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CHANGES & CHANCES



MRS. CAREY BROCK.



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A TALE

BY

MRS. CAREY BROCK

AUTHOR OF

'SUNDAY ECHOES IN WEEKDAY HOURS,' 'WORKING AND WAITING,' ETC.



THE PRIORY HOUSE.

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TO
THE DEAREST OF CRITICS
THIS LITTLE TALE

IS
DEDICATED.

APRIL, 1882.





CHANGES AND CHANCES.

CHAPTER I.

"AND so you've quite made up your mind to let her go?"

"Yes; I think so."

The speakers were two elderly gentlemen, who sat together in the drawing-room of a house in one of the principal terraces of a fashionable English watering-place.

"Well, well," continued the first speaker; "of course it's for you to decide, and it's no business of mine—no business at all; but I think you'll regret it. I have no right to interfere; and yet I can't, for the life of me, help saying what I think."

And the portly old gentleman ceased twirling his gold watch chain, and, folding his arms together, sat back in his chair.

"You'll forgive me, I know," he added, as he remarked the anxious look on the countenance of his companion, a thin worn man with white hair, a delicately moulded face, and a sallow skin, which formed a strong contrast to his own scarcely touched black locks, decided features, and ruddy complexion.

"We're old friends now, and you know it's only because I take such a deep interest in little Hope that I speak at all."

"Of course I do," replied his friend, "and I'm very much obliged to you. I can never forget your kindness to me during my dear wife's illness, nor all you have done for us ever since we have been here. I am only very sorry that this plan of Hope's going abroad with Mademoiselle Mallerie does not meet with your full approval."

The family doctor, for such he was, gave a kind of grunt as Mr. Savile uttered the last words. It seemed such a very mild way of stating the matter, considering how utterly he had disapproved of the plan ever since it had been first started. The grunt did not escape his companion's observation.

"You see," he continued, "Miss Savile has set her mind upon it."

Dr. Theophilus Andrewes checked the sentiment he was about to utter with regard to his value of Miss Savile's opinion, remembering that she was Mr. Savile's sister.

"And I really think it is the best thing that can be done under the circumstances," continued Mr. Savile, going over, perhaps for the hundredth time, the various arguments by which he had at last been convinced of the advisability of sending his only and dearly loved little daughter to continue her education abroad under the care of the same lady who had now for some time conducted it at home. "Hope is very fond of Mademoiselle Mallerie."

"And not very fond of her aunt—small blame to her," said the doctor to himself; for this also was not a sentiment to utter aloud.

"And she does not get on very well with her aunt," continued Mr. Savile. "My sister has never cared much for young people, and she has very strict ideas of the deference due by them to their elders; and Hope—poor little woman—has been accustomed to having her own way a good deal."

"She was a devoted daughter to her mother," replied the doctor. "I never could have believed that a child of her age was capable of such devotion, or of such clever, skilful nursing, if I had not seen it."

"That's true, doctor, perfectly true," replied Mr. Savile, the tears rising to his mild blue eyes; "but for all that I don't think you quite understand Hope. She was devoted to her mother because she loved her; but she does not care for her aunt—she is such a very different person."

"Very," said Dr. Andrewes, drily.

"And, besides, Hope *is* a little spoiled. I see it myself; perhaps not in quite as strong a light as my sister would desire, but still I *do* see it. Her mother's long illness was a great interruption to her education. There had been no regularity in the house for so long before she went to London, and since her return—it's quite true," he added, unconsciously repeating the very words that his maiden sister was constantly uttering—"it's quite true, as her aunt says, that the life she has led has been much too desultory to be at all good for a young girl."

"Yet she has managed to make better use of her desultory life, and turn her interrupted studies to greater advantage than any other young lady of her age I have ever had the pleasure of coming across," replied the pertinacious old doctor. "Mademoiselle Mallerie told me, when she did us the honour of spending an evening with us whilst staying with you, that she had been teaching for the last fifteen years, and had never before had such a delightful pupil. But if she had not told me how bright and well-informed the child is, I am not such an old fool that I could not have found it out for myself. I have never been blessed with children of my own, it's true (because I'm so fond of them, I suppose); but I know pretty well what children are like, and I never return from a drive with Hope without telling

my wife what a charming companion I have found her. I shall miss her dreadfully."

Mr. Savile smiled, the faint smile which seemed rather to increase than to dispel the habitual melancholy of his countenance.

"Is that why you are so opposed to her going away?"

"No," said the doctor, "you know it is not. I have told you over and over again what my objections are. I am fond enough of Hope to have been quite willing to part with her, if I had thought it would be for her good. If you had decided on sending her to a good English school, I should have been content to see her go; but I can't bear the idea of her going so far away. Such an inexperienced creature as she is, and so pretty!—the prettiest little being I ever set my eyes upon. But there!" he added, pushing back his chair, and rising to take leave, "it's foolish to talk any more about it. I've said my say, and relieved my conscience. If trouble comes, it won't be through any fault of mine. I only fatigue you by entering into these discussions, and spoil the effect of my own medicines. The thing is settled now, and we have to make the best of it, and not trouble ourselves any more with doubts and fears."

And he held out his hand to say good-bye.

It was a relief to Mr. Savile to see him go, but he did not obey his parting injunction to think no more about it. On the contrary, no sooner had the door closed than he settled himself to consider over again all that he had said to him during this and many previous conversations on the same subject. Perhaps he *had* been mistaken in giving his consent to his sister's wish that Hope might be sent abroad with Mademoiselle Mallerie. It had been no plan of his. On the contrary, when first suggested to him he had been as strongly opposed to it as it was in his nature to be to anything. But his sister had argued with him until at

length he had come to the conclusion that it was really the best way of settling a very difficult question—the question of Hope's present education and future character and prospects.

Mr. Savile was a very weak man, physically, intellectually, and mentally. Yet he had never awoke to the sense of his own weakness—nor, indeed, had it ever been made very apparent to other people—from the simple fact that all through his life, which had now extended to half a century, his weakness had been well supported by some one else's strength. His mother had been a strong-minded woman, who ruled her household with a rod of iron, and he had been completely under her influence. Happily for himself, his marriage, very early in life with a girl whom he had known from childhood, met with his mother's approval; not only because his young wife was very beautiful and likely to be one day very rich, being the only child of a wealthy merchant in their own town, but also because, although not intellectual, or caring much for literary pursuits, she was clever, and firm, and very self-reliant, and Mrs. Savile knew that in these qualities her only son was singularly deficient. Henry Savile had been educated by his widowed mother with a view to his becoming a lawyer, but he had not completed his studies for that profession when his early engagement to Mary Clifden had led to his relinquishing, with his mother's consent, all thought of it, and entering into business with his father-in-law. For two years the young couple lived under the shadow of the homes where they had been respectively born and brought up, and their little son Frank was the darling of his two grandparents—his father's widowed mother and his mother's widowed father.

Then changes came. The first was the failure of Henry Savile's health, which had been delicate from a child. The

medical men pronounced it necessary that he should go to a warm climate, and as his father-in-law had a branch of his business in India, to India the young couple went ; and there, some years afterwards, their second child, Hope, was born—sent, Mrs. Savile used to say, to comfort them in their grief at parting with their little Frank, who had been sent home to England and placed under the care of his maternal grandfather ; his father's mother, who would doubtless have claimed the right to take charge of him, having died six months before, since which event Mr. Savile's early home at Wallingford had been broken up. His only sister, Miss Lucilla Savile, had always hated it, and on her mother's death had immediately let the house, and determined on carrying out a long-cherished desire to travel, so that there had been no one to interfere with old Mr. Clifden's wish to welcome his little grandson to his mother's early home. There he had been—we cannot say trained, for, alas, there was but little training in that house—but there he had been brought up, and there, also, had Hope, some years later, been sent to share with him their grandfather's doting affection.

For six years the two children had lived together in their grandfather's house, caressed, uncontrolled, and almost entirely uneducated ; and then their indulgent, but most unwise old grandfather was taken from them very suddenly, and it became necessary to find another home for them, just at the moment when a serious illness of Mr. Savile's rendered it impossible for either of their parents to leave India. Miss Lucilla Savile came forward to help in this emergency, selecting a school to which to send Frank, and taking Hope to live with her.

By this time Miss Lucilla had become somewhat weary of constantly moving about, and rather liked the idea of settling down for two or three years in a pleasant English watering-

place. Moreover, she calculated that the income which her brother would allow her if she took charge herself of Hope, and thus obviated the necessity of her being sent to school, to which her mother had a great objection, would enable her to live in much better style than it had ever yet been in her power to do ; and, as it was proposed to engage a good governess, the superintendence of the child would not involve the sacrifice of much personal comfort and convenience. So Frank was sent to school, and Hope and the governess chosen for her established in Miss Savile's new home at Westbourne.

Neither arrangement proved satisfactory. Frank had not completed his first term before the head-master wrote to say that he did not wish him to return after the holidays. That this was not to be attributed to any want of care or wisdom in his aunt's selection of a school was proved afterwards, when the same thing happened in the second school to which the boy was sent, this time one of his mother's own choosing. But this did not appear at first ; and when the news of their son's disgrace reached his parents in India, and they heard at the same time from friends in England that Hope was in delicate health, they could no longer bear the anxieties caused by separation from their children, and resolved on returning home. Their way to do so had been made much easier by the medical men giving it as their opinion that the change, so far from injuring Mr. Savile's health, still extremely delicate, was, indeed, likely now to benefit it, and by a cousin's having joined the firm to whom he was able to leave its management.

CHAPTER II.

THE first two years after her parents' return from India had been a very happy time to Hope. It is true that her aunt Lucilla still remained a member of the household, and between Hope and her aunt a kind of antipathy had existed ever since they had lived together; the impulsiveness and generosity of the former being a constant source of annoyance to the cold, calculating character of the latter. But after Mr. and Mrs. Savile's return, their relations together assumed a different character. Indeed, Miss Lucilla Savile had seemed a changed person since she had lived under the same roof as her sister-in-law. How it was that they agreed so well was a mystery to many who had seen governess after governess, and maid after maid, leave Miss Savile's service, all declaring the same thing, that no one could live with such a "difficult person." That Mr. Savile "got on" with his sister was easier of comprehension, for he was one of those meek individuals who would give in to any one, and put up with anything, for the sake of peace. But Mrs. Savile was a person of decided principles and firm character. She at once took her rightful position as mistress of her own house, and assumed the entire control of her daughter; but she did so with such quiet gracefulness and simple self-possession, that no opportunity was afforded for contention or even for offence-taking, and Miss Lucilla had found it as easy as it was desirable to remain as a visitor in the house

where she had hitherto been mistress. She had made up her mind beforehand to endeavour to do so, for her love of ease and of style had led her into various expenses which she was afraid she would, in her changed circumstances, find it difficult now to meet ; and a home in her brother's house free of expense was an advantage, for the sake of which it would be worth her while to pocket a good deal of pride and endure a good many affronts. But her pride was allowed to slumber undisturbed, and there were no affronts to be endured. So Miss Lucilla had quietly become a member of her brother's family, coming and going when she liked, and always finding a welcome even from Hope, whose antipathy to her had seemed to be dispelled by the influence of the healthy atmosphere which her mother's happy, loving nature created around her. Even Frank felt its influence, and was so much more quiet and gentleman-like during his vacations, that his parents could not help believing that he had really greatly improved, in spite of the school reports which still told constantly of idleness and insubordination.

Thus two happy years passed, and then came fresh changes and heavier trials. Frank, who had been sent to the university, had not completed his first year there when the news came of his having been rusticated ; and not very long after this sorrow, and his being sent abroad under the care of a tutor, the first symptoms showed themselves in Mrs. Savile of a fearful and fatal malady. How far mental anxiety on her son's account had led to this, Hope never dared to think.

She devoted herself to nursing her mother and ministering to her comfort, until at length the good doctor, with whom we have already made acquaintance, declared that her health was suffering in consequence, and it was decided, sadly against Hope's wish, and in spite of her earnest entreaties, that she must be sent from home for a time. By

her mother's desire she was placed under the care of Mademoiselle Mallerie, an early school friend of Mrs. Savile's, who had been lost to her sight for many years, but with whom she had lately renewed acquaintance through mutual friends in India, whose children were under her charge. That this friendship had not been revived earlier was a source of great regret to Mrs. Savile, for no sooner had she renewed it than she felt that Mademoiselle Mallerie would have been exactly the person to have exercised a good influence over her impetuous, high-spirited, yet affectionate and noble-minded little daughter.

"If it were not for my yearning to keep her with us, I should like to place Hope with Mademoiselle Mallerie," she had said to her husband, as they returned one evening to their hotel in London, after spending a day with that lady, and seeing something of her management of her aunt's household, and the six pupils entrusted to their care. So that when it became impossible for Mrs. Savile any longer to direct her child's education, and her terrible illness began to assume a form which made it undesirable that Hope should be much with her, she herself wrote to Mademoiselle Mallerie begging her to pay her a few days' visit, and this visit resulted in Hope's returning to London with her.

A heavy trial it was to her to leave her parents, and especially her mother; but the nature of youth is elastic, and Hope's nature possessed this quality in a very remarkable degree—her schoolfellows often laughingly asserting that her parents must have named her Hope in the spirit of prophecy—and when weeks passed and brought better, rather than worse, reports of her mother's health, her spirits returned. Study, as it was carried on at Mademoiselle Mallerie's, was a new life to her. Miss Lucilla was a woman of little brain, although strong of character and strict of rule.

Mrs. Savile, though possessed of considerable talent, and much practical ability of various kinds, was not a person of literary tastes, and Hope's powers of mind had lain dormant for want of being called into exercise. Now they sprang into rapid life. Books which had before been task-masters, grew to be her pleasantest companions. Time, which so often had hung heavily on her hands, became all too short for the happy, bright occupation provided for it. Mrs. Savile's discernment of character had not failed her when she had given it as her opinion that Mademoiselle Mallerie was a true educator. The secret of her success in teaching lay in her singular power of sympathy; and this, going straight to Hope's warm heart, woke up responsive echoes there.

The governesses selected by Miss Savile, with an especial regard to their "strictness" and power of "keeping the child in order," had conducted her education and trained her character (or failed to train it) upon totally different principles. With them, to govern was to reprove, to suspect, and to watch. With Mademoiselle Mallerie it was to commend, to trust, and, above all, to love; not so much constantly to repress the tendency to do wrong, as constantly to arouse the desire to do right. And yet the rules which Mademoiselle Mallerie laid down for her household were quite as strictly adhered to as any of those which Hope found it so hard to keep in her aunt Lucilla's. Perhaps the reason of this was that no one was so careful in adhering to her own rules as Mademoiselle Mallerie herself. Her bedroom door opened each morning and her quiet step was heard on the stairs as the clock struck, and no one liked to be less punctual than she was. It was not Mademoiselle Mallerie's custom, as it had been Miss Lucilla's, to go round her house daily, at certain hours, like a policeman on duty—peering into every corner with a sharp eye of

scrutiny and a countenance prepared for reproof. But the girls knew they might expect little visits from her at any hour of the day, and an approving glance round a tidy room, and a few words of admiration given to pretty little pictures on the walls, or carefully arranged flowers on the tables, produced more effect in exciting to neatness and elegance in the care of their bedrooms than many exhortations to order or reproofs for carelessness could have done. There was no stiffness in her intercourse with her pupils, there was very little strictness. All her success lay in her true love for them, and real interest in them, and in their deep personal respect for her. Her patience with the dullest amongst them, her self-control with the most provoking, seemed marvellous to those who did not know what was the motive which led to so much gentleness, and painstaking, and sympathy, even that love in her own heart for the greatest of all educators, the Great Master Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, which led her to look upon education as one of the noblest of works : a great and holy privilege entrusted to her by Him, to be carried on for Him, under His daily and hourly guidance, and to His present and eternal glory.

But this is a long digression, and we return to Hope, and the physical and moral development which her mother rejoiced to see in her, when at the end of her first half year at school—if a school it could be called where there were only six pupils, and the whole thing was conducted like a well-ordered, happy home,—she returned to find her mother dying, and to nurse and cheer her during the few weeks she had yet to remain on earth.

On the last evening of Mrs. Savile's life a conversation had taken place between her husband and herself which had weighed much on Mr. Savile's mind, giving rise to the many anxious discussions which had lately been carried

on between himself and his one intimate friend, Dr. Andrewes.

"Henry," his wife had said to him, as he sat beside her sofa, with her thin pale hand in his, "your and Hope's patient nursing will soon be over now. Dr. Andrewes confessed this morning that he found me much weaker than usual, and I am weaker now than I was then. I shall not live long. When I am gone I hope you will send our darling back to Mademoiselle Mallerie."

"She will be a great loss to me," her husband had replied. "She would be my greatest comfort."

"And so I hope she will be one day," Mrs. Savile continued. "It is because I am so anxious that she should be a comfort to you, that I wish her to remain with Mademoiselle Mallerie for a time. She is still very young."

"Only sixteen," said Mr. Savile, with a heavy sigh.

"And very, very pretty," continued Mrs. Savile, responding with a yet heavier sigh; one fraught with more anxious fears and forebodings.

"Andrewes said this morning he had never seen such a pretty girl in his life," replied her husband. "He has set his heart on having her likeness taken by that artist friend of his. He declares that she is a perfect picture, and——"

His wife interrupted him. Her thoughts were looking forward into the realities of eternity, and his words jarred.

"Never mind that now," she said; "we know she is very lovely, and beauty is often a great snare."

"Not always," Mr. Savile replied. He was about to add that his wife's own beauty had been no snare to her, but he checked himself. She had never liked personal compliments, and something in her look and voice restrained him from uttering one now.

"No," she said; "not always, we know that it need never be. It is one of God's gifts, perhaps the one of all others

on those of her child, equally large and beautiful, but lustrous with health and animation, she had said—

“You have very strong affections, Hope; yours is a warm, trusting, clinging nature.”

Hope’s eyes filled with tears. She knew it was so; and oh, how hard it seemed to have the dearest object of these strong affections taken from her, to be torn from the prop to which, with all the warmth of this confiding nature, she had learned to cling more closely than to any other.

She found no voice to answer, and her mother continued—

“Promise me then, my darling, that you will not let yourself love or trust any one who is not good and true, and will not lead you right. I mean,” she added, for her mind reverted to Frank, “that you will not make a friend of any one who is not good, or allow yourself to be influenced by them. Our affections are under our own control, Hope, or rather, I should say, God will always give us the needful strength to make them so. Promise me that you will not enter into any friendship on which you cannot hope for God’s blessing, into any intimacy which will not lead you nearer to Him, but which may be a snare and a stumbling-block. It is the last promise I shall ever ask from my little daughter.”

And Hope gave it.

CHAPTER III.

THREE months later and Hope, with Mademoiselle Mallerie, and the two young girls who were to be her fellow pupils, stepped on board the steamer which was to convey them to the French shore. To all three girls the sea voyage seemed a first experience, for Hope's journey from India, when she was but three years old, had long ago past from her mind. Her memory was a short one. Present events took too strong a hold over her interest and sympathy for past ones to retain a strong impression. And yet some past events were stamped so deeply upon her remembrance that no future time served to obliterate them. Long years after they would rise up as fresh as ever, each sight as clear as when first seen, each sound as distinct as when first heard. These had been the occasions when Hope had thought deeply and suffered intensely. But the recollection of most of the things that had happened to her in her young life had quickly faded from it under the influence of new scenes and interests, and as she stood with her two companions on the deck of the steamer, everything around appeared as new to her as to them.

Of these two companions, one was her dear friend, Elsie Gordon. The other was a young girl, named Rose Prynne, the adopted niece of Colonel Prynne, an old friend of her father's and her aunt's, who was acting on the advice which Miss Lucilla had given him in committing her to Made-

moiselle Mallerie's care. Hope had some previous acquaintance with this girl, who had stayed with them once at Westbourne, and a very heavy shadow had been thrown over the prospect of spending a year abroad with Elsie, when she found it would be spent with Rose Prynne also.

It had been the first meeting between Hope and Elsie since Mrs. Savile's death, and Elsie's heart was full of sorrowful love and sympathy for her friend. Very full was it also of indignation for the giddy girl, who could not be restrained, either by the sight of Hope's deep mourning, or by all Elsie's attempts to check her, from indulging in ceaseless and foolish talk whenever Mademoiselle Mallerie left the three girls together. Once on board, however, there was soon an end of her foolish chat and laughter.

Mademoiselle Mallerie had written to secure sofas for her party, but the stewardess explained politely that they were so full at this season, that she had only been able to retain one sofa, and three berths—two upper ones, side by side, into one of which a port-hole opened, and a third in rather a close corner of the cabin apart from the others.


Before Mademoiselle Mallerie could make any choice, Rose exclaimed—

"*I* must have the sofa; I would not get into one of those nasty things on any account. The sofa is bad enough."

Mademoiselle Mallerie took no notice whatever. "This young lady," she said, laying her hand on Hope's shoulder, and addressing herself to the stewardess, "will have the sofa."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Hope, "indeed not, Mademoiselle; of course it must be for you."

"I believe it is for me to arrange as I think best, Hope," replied Mademoiselle Mallerie, with a smile. "I am an experienced sailor, and you are not. Besides, I have no



been worn out lately with bad nights, and have not been ill as you have. You will have the sofa, Hope, and Rose can take one of the upper berths—whichever she likes best.”

“I won’t get into either of them,” exclaimed Rose; “if I don’t have the sofa, I won’t stop in the cabin. I’ll go on deck, and walk about all night.”

Mademoiselle Mallerie fixed her eyes firmly, but very quietly, on the excited girl.

“If you do not make use of one of these berths,” she said calmly, “you will have to lie on the floor. I shall certainly not compel you to get into a berth; but if you were to attempt to leave the cabin without my permission, I should not hesitate to keep you here by force, grieved as I should be to treat a girl of your age as though she were a child. As it is, I am thoroughly ashamed of you, and of the annoyance you must be causing.”

And Mademoiselle Mallerie looked apologetically towards a party of ladies who were already established on their sofas, and who seemed infinitely amused at the display of this young lady’s temper.

Quite unaccustomed to be treated with such quiet firmness, Rose appeared subdued for the moment, and when Mademoiselle Mallerie added quietly—

“Now, which of these upper berths would you prefer? as I said, you may take your choice;” she answered, sulkily, but quietly—

“I’ll have that one with the window in it; I should be suffocated in the other.”

“I had intended the other upper berth for you, Elsie,” said Mademoiselle Mallerie; “but I think I had better take it myself, and leave the little corner one to you.”

A wise arrangement, as they all thought, when, later on in the night, the vessel glided out of the river, and the waves of the sea tossing her to and fro, most of the passengers

began to suffer more or less ; and though Rose was amongst the latter number, her groans and complaints became louder and louder, disturbing her fellow-passengers far more than the less irritating noise of creaking boards and straining screws.


With early morning the steamer entered the harbour ; and then another scene took place.

It had required the united efforts of Mademoiselle and the stewardess to get Rose out of her berth ; and long after Hope and Elsie had gone on deck, under the escort of the other ladies, she sat crying on a sofa, declaring that she was "deadly ill," that she "should faint" if she moved, that "she would never, never put her foot in a steamer again," until, at length, she suffered herself to be almost carried up the companion-ladder.

Once on shore, however, the fresh air dispelling all vestiges of the "awful sea-sickness," the new sights and scenes around her soon set her tongue in motion again, and kept it in full activity during the day as they travelled through the picturesque country, each silently thinking that the companionship of this silly girl was the only drawback to their enjoyment.

On arriving at the town where they were to stop for the night, they drove to the hotel which had been recommended to them ; but there also they found that a press of visitors made accommodation difficult.

Rose had condescended to express her approval of the outward appearance of the place—a huge pile of buildings, ranged around an imposing square, into which they had driven through a stone arch-way. As they made their way up the broad staircase, resting on the different landings, and, as they did so, casting glances through the open doors into the apartments beyond, with their walls shining with gilded mirrors, and their windows and beds draped with crimson



velvet, her face assumed a different expression from that which it had worn in the stuffy cabin of the "Atalanta." But as they passed from the "premier" to the "second," and thence to the "troisième" and "quatrième," the surroundings became gradually less and less grand; and when at last the chamber-maid, opening the door of a large room with three beds in it, informed Mademoiselle Mallerie that this was the only vacant room they had at present, except a very small one at the end of the passage, Rose no longer felt that she was about to be treated in what she considered fitting style. Mademoiselle Mallerie asked to see the small room, and the girl led the way to it.

"Fancy sleeping here!" exclaimed Rose, with a contemptuous glance at the tiny bed and the scanty pieces of furniture which blocked up the small space the room afforded.

Mademoiselle Mallerie took no notice of the remark as she informed the maid that she would occupy this room herself, and the three young ladies would share the larger one, begging that they might be made ready at once, as they were very weary and wished to retire immediately after supper.

But if Rose's companions imagined that to retire to their room was to find rest there, they were doomed to disappointment. Rose had at once fixed on the bed which appeared to her the most comfortable, and which, consequently, she decided to occupy. But the flock mattress which on first examination promised a soft resting-place, proved to be the very reverse, and loud and bitter were Rose's complaints as she tossed to and fro, declaring that she should be full of bruises before the night was over, that the bed might as well be stuffed with marbles.

Hope, lying quiet in her somewhat hard but not uncomfortable bed, was secretly triumphing over the selfish girl's discomfiture, which was affording her infinite amusement,

and a considerable amount of satisfaction, when Elsie Gordon made her quite angry, by saying quietly—

“Would you like to change beds with me? It seems to me, from what you girls say, that I have come off the best, for mine is neither hard nor lumpy; it’s very comfortable. I’ll change with you, if you like.”

“Well, I can but try,” said Rose.

The change was effected, and, without one word of thanks; Rose declaring that “it was ever so much better—quite comfortable indeed after that wretched thing,” went off to sleep.

“Well, you *are* a little goose,” said Hope. “I was just rejoicing in the idea of her being paid out for her selfishness, when you must needs spoil it all.”

“You ought to be very much obliged to me,” said Elsie, “for we ran a chance of being kept awake another night. Besides, you know, Hope, I am a very good sleeper, and somehow I felt that it was only right to offer to change with her.”


She did not add that she had been prompted to do so by the consciousness of some lurkings in her own heart of that inclination to triumph which Hope had not scrupled to entertain in hers; but, making herself as comfortable as she could amidst the lumps of flock, she too went off to sleep, and dreamed that she was sitting in her own seat in the old pew at home, listening to one of her dear father’s earnest sermons.

On the last Sunday that she had been at church, he had preached on the story of the Good Samaritan. His words had gone home, as most of that dear father’s words did, to his little daughter’s heart. She had realised the truth they taught, that if we are to be the true children of the heavenly Father, we must be like Him who makes His sun to shine on the just and on the unjust, and sends His rain on the

unthankful and the evil. We must be prepared to show kindness, not only to those we love, and with whom we have sympathy, but to all. Perhaps there was some unconscious connection between Elsie's dream and the unselfishness she had just shown towards disagreeable Rose Prynne.

CHAPTER IV.

Six months later, and the "Campagne Beaumanoir" had become a second and a very happy home to Hope. If Mrs. Savile had said of Mademoiselle Mallerie's pupils in London that they enjoyed all the pleasures of the happiest of homes with all the advantages of the best of schools, how much more would she have said so now. For at Beaumanoir there were none of the restraints which life in London necessitated; none of those even to which Hope had been accustomed in the watering-places where she had spent the last years of her life. It was a freer existence than any she had known since the early days when she lived with her brother in their grandfather's house at Wallingford. Never since those early days had Hope known the delight of a home surrounded by grounds of its own—gardens and shrubberies where one could wander at will. This new, unrestrained life reminded her of that old one. Not that there was any real similarity, for there was none, save in the quiet surroundings of both places, and the freedom from conventionalities which such quiet surroundings secured to her. Her grandfather's house lay indeed in the very heart of a large town, but the house had existed long before the first signs of the town had shown themselves. Year after year streets and squares had thickened around it; church spires and factory chimneys had sprung up where once tall elms and stately oaks had reared their heads. The shadows of



great stone buildings fell on the very walks of the garden and across the long grass of the paddock, and the dust from the factories found its way into the rooms, and soiled the muslin curtains which, in former days, had been the pride of a country housewife ; but once within the high walls that enclosed the place, and all was stillness and seclusion, with only just enough sound of the world outside to stir into life the imagination of a child like Hope.

A very strange life had little Hope Savile led in that old house ; a very solitary one too, for she had no companions save her grandfather and her brother, the servants, and the daily governess, who came to her for two hours in the morning and taught her nothing. In those early days Hope might have been said to be her own mistress, going her own way, and choosing her own amusements and occupations. These varied with her varying moods. There were days when it pleased her best to forget this outside world altogether, when even Frank's presence was unwelcome to her ; and leaving him to swing alone in the broad walk that ran down the centre of the garden, or to play at marbles and pitch-and-toss in the stables with the stable-boy—amusements of which he was only too fond—the little girl would steal away into the tangled paths of the shrubbery, where the long-neglected shrubs formed leafy roofs, beneath which she would stroll for hours, enjoying the soft stillness of the evening air, and the sweet fragrance of the uncultured flowers growing all around in rich profusion.

At other times it would be her delight to bring herself as closely as she could within the influence of the outer world. Then she would steal up of an evening into her little bedroom, when her grandfather had fallen asleep in his arm-chair, and Frank had made his escape to the servants' hall to get a share of the welsh rabbit and the warm ale which

he knew he should find there, and afterwards to watch them playing at cards, occasionally even to join in their games. At such times, Hope, who hated the very sight of the greasy cards, and felt sick at the odour of the beer, would steal away quietly to her own room. There, perched on the high window seat, she would listen to the sound of the carriages, imagining where they were going, and whom they were conveying, until she could almost see the figures which her fancy conjured up—generally of young girls on their way to some scene of pleasure and interest. Not that she herself knew anything of such scenes, she had only read of them in her story-books, those story-books which were her chief delight in the long winter hours, when she could neither sit at her open window, or wander in the alleys of the shrubbery. Perhaps, had Mrs. Savile known how strong was the power of imagination in her little daughter's mind, she might have been more sparing in the food she provided for it in the plentiful supply of books which found their way from London to Clifden House. And yet Hope's imagination did her kindly service, and in the absence of other teaching, she learned much from these story books. The heroes and heroines of whom she read were her life's friends.

Her mother's choice of books was good, and from them Hope learned almost the only lessons worth learning during her early childhood. They gave her an insight into life, taught her the difference between right and wrong, refined her tastes, and provided her with all the religious instruction that she ever received. The children went to church certainly, but the servant who took them there, never cared how they behaved when they were there; and Hope's only recollections in after-life of the church-going of her childhood was that she used to occupy herself during the prayers in studying the pictures in an old-fashioned prayer-book of her grandfather's, whilst during the sermon she would amuse

herself by weaving fresh scenes for her favourite heroes and heroines, carrying on their histories from the time when they stopped in her story books into future years. But this is a long digression.


If Hope's early home at her grandfather's, an old English country house buried in the centre of a new English manufacturing town, had afforded food for her lively imagination, how much more did it now find to feed upon in this picturesque old house, which, moreover, bore a very real resemblance in some respects to another old-fashioned house which was dearer to her than any she had ever known, the quaint, ancient residence of Dr. Andrewes at Westbourne. It was, however, in the ruins and in the grounds of Beaumanoir that Hope especially delighted, and these were unlike anything she had ever seen even in imagination. The place had long ago passed from the possession of its original owners, and had for many years now been rented by Madame Mallerie ; and here for some time her eldest daughter—lately married to a silk-merchant in the neighbouring town of Francheville—had kept a "pension" for ladies, which had been very deservedly the favourite "pension" in that favourite neighbourhood. A more charming place could scarcely be pictured. The château had been in former times a mansion of considerable extent, but the greater part of the building had long ago fallen into ruins ; and the actual house in which the family lived, and which Madame Mallerie had had put into thorough order when she established her "pension" there, was in reality only a wing of the original building, added to it quite of late years.

The grounds attached to the old manorial castle, once very extensive, had long ago been sold to different owners, and converted into farms ; and all the neighbouring country was dotted with pretty farm-houses, surrounded with

orchards. Never could there be pleasanter walks than those which led from one of these farms to another, over gently sloping hills covered with soft green sward, or through lanes over-shadowed with beautiful trees—lanes in which grew flowers, such as the girls had never seen before, flowers countless in number, and which bloomed through every season in the year.

The Malleries had lived so long in the neighbourhood that the occupants of these farms were well known to them, and there had been great lamentation when the news was announced that Mademoiselle was going to be married to a gentleman in the neighbouring town of Francheville, and that they would receive no more visits from the English ladies at Beaumanoir, since the "pension" was to be given up. But their friendly hearts had been greatly comforted by the arrival of Mademoiselle Mallerie's sister, whom they knew well also, with the three young English ladies, who were soon on the pleasantest terms of friendship with them. The ripest wild strawberries from the neighbouring woods, the clearest honey from the numerous hives, were always forthcoming on the pleasant evenings when Mademoiselle brought the girls out to drink fresh milk and eat home-made cake at these pleasant farms.

Nor were these excursions, in which they were often accompanied by Mademoiselle Mallerie's sister, Madame Raymond and her step-children, the only pleasures and interests that enlivened their days at Beaumanoir. They went constantly to the town of Francheville, which was only two miles off—twice every week for music and drawing lessons, often to attend classes, or hear lectures; and always on Sundays, when they attended morning and evening service at the English chapel, spending the rest of the day with the Raymonds. Hope had never before imagined that she could care for any town, but Francheville was full of varied



interest. Its old churches and their monuments, its ancient fortifications, once so formidable, now ivy-covered and adorned with wild flowers, its fine old gates, its river and picturesque bridges, the ruins that abounded everywhere, all offered a wide scope for the exercise of her artistic tastes and lively imagination. The letters she wrote home, the sketches she enclosed in them, the vivid descriptions she gave of her town and country interests witnessed to the rapid development of her mind and tastes quite as strongly as did Mademoiselle Mallerie's letters, telling of the satisfaction which Hope's rapid progress in every branch of study afforded both herself and all her masters.

These letters were read by Dr. Andrewes with more delight than by any one else, unless indeed it were Mrs. Andrewes.


"Any news of Hope?" was always the question that followed the medical inquiries, to which he considered it his duty to give the first place; and as he studied every sentence of his little favourite's letters, admiring every sketch, and laughing at every joke, he would allow that, after all, his fears had been groundless.

"The child," he would say, "keeps all her English ideas and tastes, and so long as this is the case, she will be safe enough."

The good old gentleman's dread was of "foreign folks and foreign ways," his experience of both being, however, but a limited one.

CHAPTER V.

HOPE Savile and Elsie Gordon sat together in the deep window seat of the oak parlour at Beaumanoir—Hope's favourite room in all the house, because it reminded her more than any other of the dear drawing-room at the old Priory-house, where she had spent such happy hours with Doctor and Mrs. Andrewes. It was a lovely evening, one of those evenings when Hope used to say it was a delight only to live, and when she found it difficult to give her mind even to the studies that she loved, or to anything but enjoyment. The flower-beds beneath the open window at which they sat, were already radiant with lovely jonquils, marguerites, large, many coloured pansies, and sweet early roses; vine-wreaths clustered round the window sills, the evening sunshine gleamed through the foliage of the trees, beginning to be rich and full, and the soft velvety turf was bright with bits of golden light, glancing in and out amongst the shadows which the surrounding ruins threw upon it; whilst from the meadow came the sweet fragrance of the early crop of hay which that especially sunny June had ripened into unusual growth, and the sound of the birds singing in the trees, and the insects buzzing in the still air, mingled with the soft evening breeze in an undescribable soothing stir—to which the two girls seemed to be paying but little heed, however truly they might be feel-



ing its influence. They were deep in talk, which their countenances showed to be of interesting character.

"Now that it is settled," said Elsie, "I am happier than I can say. It has seemed the one link wanting in our friendship. You do not know how I have missed it, but you will now that we shall go together to the Holy Communion."

Elsie's face was bright with happiness. People said sometimes that she was the least good-looking of Mademoiselle Mallerie's three pupils. And it was true that she could neither lay claim to Rose's regular features, fine black eyes, and clear, highly-coloured complexion; or to the singular charms of face and figure that might now have made Dr. Andrewes pronounce more emphatically than ever, that "Hope was the loveliest little creature that any one could expect to see in the course of a long life." But at times, when the force of some inward feeling brought a sudden light into her large grey eyes, and the joy that was warm at her heart, shed a soft glow over her cheeks, Elsie also might almost be said to be lovely; and at all times there was a sweet stillness about her, a refinement of form and feature, and a gentleness of voice and manner that made her peculiarly attractive. Both girls were clever and very thoughtful, but in very different ways. Hope's was an eager, questioning mind, always longing for something more than this world had ever given her; throwing her whole energy into the pursuits and enjoyments of life, yet failing to find in either the full satisfaction she expected. Elsie, on the contrary, was rarely excited and never eager: always really interested in the duty or pleasure of the moment, yet never so absorbed in it as to be unable to respond to a fresh call from somewhere else, though somehow the girls used to declare that whatever the work might be, Elsie always seemed the one to do it best; and no matter what the

amusement might be, more of the pleasure of it seemed to fall to her than to any one else. Mademoiselle had been remarking these facts and commenting inwardly upon them that very afternoon in the hay field, where Elsie had been more energetic than any one, yet afterwards when the other girls were hot and tired, and Rose very complaining, she was so cool and quiet, that it was difficult to believe she had worked the hardest of them all.

The evening's studies had been excused in consideration of the afternoon's fatigue, and also because a visitor had arrived on a matter of much importance—a matter which had been under very grave discussion ever since Mr. Danvers, the chaplain, had informed Mademoiselle that an English bishop, a friend of his own, was intending shortly to visit him, and had promised to hold a confirmation at Beaumanoir. Now this subject of confirmation had been much on Mademoiselle Mallerie's mind with regard to Hope. Had they remained in London she had hoped that she would have been confirmed this summer, for she felt her to be fully prepared in heart, although her neglected religious education had made her ignorant of much of that fundamental knowledge, which it is such a help to possess in preparing for confirmation. So that it was with special thankfulness that she received the chaplain's tidings of the bishop's intention, and at once expressed her wish that Hope should join the class which he was about to form—a small class of, probably, only seven or eight, in which she would receive far more individual instruction and attention than could have been the case in the large classes which were held yearly at St. Mary's, Marylebone.

But when Mademoiselle Mallerie mentioned her wishes to Hope, to her surprise, Hope shrank back, fearing her ignorance and unpreparedness.

To her still greater surprise, Rose came forward, expressing

her desire to join the class, and refusing to see any reasons why Mademoiselle Mallerie should not wish her to do so equally with Hope.

In many respects Rose Prynne had altered much and improved greatly since she had been at Beaumanoir. The childish rages which brought her into contempt, even in the eyes of the servants, were rarely indulged in now; the studies to which it was absolutely necessary to attend, if she were to be a sharer in the pleasures that followed them, were no longer neglected; complaints to which no one paid the slightest heed had gradually ceased, and rules which it brought her into more trouble and privation to defy than to obey were followed, but the most charitably disposed person—and surely no one could judge more gently than Mademoiselle—could not have discovered in Rose Prynne any signs of that preparation of heart without which confirmation may be a very great sin, but can never be a blessing. Often had Mademoiselle Mallerie seen, in her long experience with young people, how much positive injury is done to the soul that, with unworthy motives and unholy intentions, comes deliberately forward to lay upon itself the additional sin of a false vow, and therefore she could not consent to Rose's request, for she failed to discover any higher motive for it than the wish not to be left behind in anything in which Hope was to be brought forward. Many and painful had been the conversations which Mademoiselle had had with her on the subject, until at last Rose was prevented from ever mentioning it more, by the fact that old Madame Mallerie, coming unexpectedly into the corridor, had caught her in the act of listening at the keyhole of the "salon" to a conversation which was going on within between Mademoiselle and the chaplain about both the girls. Since then they had heard no more of Rose Prynne's wish to be confirmed, but she had been more ill-tempered than ever; and

directly after tea had retired sulkily to her own room, doubtless because she knew that Mr. Danvers was spending the evening at Beaumanoir, partly with the view of having the private conversation with Hope which he made a point of having with each of his catechumens before the day of confirmation. Elsie had not gone in search of her as she often did when these fits of sulkiness took possession of her. The opportunity afforded by her absence for a quiet talk with Hope on this special evening was too precious to be lost; and as the two girls sat together waiting for Hope's summons to the "salon," and unheeding as we have said of all but the subject of their conversation, Hope spoke to her freely of those doubts and fears which had made her shrink from so solemn a service; and Elsie explained, almost unconsciously that she was explaining, many things which Hope had found it difficult to understand, until hard things became easy, and tangled thoughts unravelled themselves.

"You are a happy girl, Elsie," said Hope, "to have had such teaching all your life."

And she sighed rather sadly. It was not until much later in life that Hope learned to understand more of the plans and purposes of the Great Gardener, who, in His perfect knowledge of what each requires, trains some of His young plants carefully from the beginning, putting in every needful nail, and cutting off every superfluous shoot on its very first appearance; whilst others He allows to grow quite uncontrolled, until, at a certain moment, He comes with pruning-knife to lop off whole branches, cutting away perhaps half the plant ere it can be fit to flourish and bear fruit to His glory in the garden of His love.

It almost rose to Elsie's lips to say, "But your mother, Hope!" for Hope had spoken to her of Mrs. Savile's happy death, and of her "sure and certain hope" of meeting her in heaven. Not very often, indeed, for though Hope had

the character of being voluble, it was not often that she could speak of those things which lay deepest in her heart. Unreserved in most things, she was most reserved in others ; and not even to Elsie could she have told what she herself had gathered from her mother's conversation during those last few weeks that they had spent together, that it was not until a terrible illness had taken hold of her life that she had begun to think of death and prepare for it. Whilst not even to herself did she think it right to say that neither her father or her aunt Lucilla had seemed to care more for religion since their great sorrow had fallen upon them than they had done before. But it had only been at Mademoiselle Mallerie's that she had seen religion made the first thing in life ; and the thought of her return to her father's house, and the difficulties that might await her in her future life there, had helped to make her shrink from taking vows upon herself which she might strive to fulfil now, but would not be able to accomplish then. But of this also she said nothing to her friend, as they talked long and earnestly, together of the triple vow that Elsie had taken upon herself a year ago, and that Hope was to take upon herself next Thursday—the vow of renunciation, of faith, and of obedience. Two such little words to be said, both of them together only containing three letters ; and yet how much would be involved in that short " I do."

CHAPTER VI.

THE confirmation was over. It had been a very simple service in the quiet little English chapel, but a very solemn one to those who took part in it. Elsie had greatly regretted that Hope could not be confirmed as she had been, in a time-honoured church, consecrated hundreds of years before to God's service, and rendered more and more sacred by the thought of the thousands of other worshippers who had knelt where they now knelt, and received the blessing where they now received it.

But Hope had no thought for anything but for the solemn act that she herself was that day performing. Until within the last few weeks she had never fully understood the promises that had been made for her at her baptism. It is true that her life at Mademoiselle Mallerie's, her friendship with Elsie Gordon, and especially the sorrow of her mother's death, had wrought a great change in her; and that for months she had been carrying on a brave and honest struggle with sin and self, striving to overcome her besetting faults, her strong will and quick temper, her love of praise and her sensitive shrinking from reproof, in which she knew lay so much hidden vanity. But her confirmation always seemed to her the turning-point in her life. That day she gave her heart to God, coming to Him not only to confirm her baptismal vow, but to be confirmed by Him in all needful strength to keep it—by the sevenfold bestowal of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Very earnest and reverent was Hope's face as she knelt before the bishop. When he laid his hands on her head and pronounced the prayer of invocation, a silent amen went up from the very depths of her heart. When she returned to her place and there knelt low in prayer, words failed her from the very fervency of her soul's desires. When the service was over, and Elsie, joining her at the chapel door, put her arm within her friend's, neither of the girls spoke, but they felt that they were bound together by a truer, firmer bond than ever before—fellow soldiers in the same army, fellow servants in the same service, fellow travellers to the same home.

And on the following Sunday they were to kneel side by side to partake of that holy food which was to be armour for the battle, strength and wisdom for the service, sustenance for the journey. Few ever forget their first communion. Either as a very blessed, or as a terribly accusing remembrance, it remains with us all through our future lives. Hope certainly never forgot hers. As she knelt at the altar rails between her two best, if not her two dearest, earthly friends, and partook of the bread and drank of the wine, a strength, such as she could scarcely have believed it possible to experience, came into her soul.

That Sunday was spent as usual at Madame Raymond's; but it was not spent quite as the Sundays there usually were. The already large family circle had been increased by the arrival of Mr. Raymond's step-son, who had been finishing his education in Germany before going to England to undertake some employment connected with his step-father's business as a silk-merchant. The girls had often heard Mary Raymond speak of this elder brother, naturally dearer to her than any other of her numerous brothers and sisters, being the only one who had the same mother as herself. The Raymond family was rather complicated, and

strangers found it somewhat difficult to understand the different relationships. Mr. Raymond's first wife had been the widow of a distant cousin of his own, which accounted for her two children bearing the same name as their half brothers and sisters. These were Mary Raymond and her brother Victor, who had been absent in Germany ever since Mademoiselle Mallerie and her pupils had been at Beaumanoir.

As they came into the house on their return from the English chapel, he was singing German hymns in a rich deep voice.

"It is Victor singing," said Mary Raymond, as the girls stopped to listen.

"How beautifully he sings!" exclaimed Hope.

"Yes," replied Mary, a flush of pleasure colouring her pale cheek; "he does everything beautifully."

It was rather a wide assertion, but it seemed as though it were true. Even during that one afternoon, how many proofs did they not receive of its truth.

During dinner they talked much of his university life in the old German town on the banks of the Rhine; and when afterwards he brought his portfolio for them to see, filled with sketches of the place and the neighbourhood—lovely water-colour drawings of the river and the overhanging old castles, of the sunny mountain slopes and the peasants in their picturesque costumes, interspersed with most spirited caricatures of his fellow students—all were astonished and enchanted at the beauty of some and the talent of all.

"Why, Victor," said Mr. Raymond, "you will be turning artist some day, and what will become of the business?"

"Not I," he replied; "if I turn anything, it will more likely be musician. But you need not be afraid, sir. I am bound to the business until I have made my fortune, and

then perhaps I may turn to the fine arts for recreation in my leisure time; but not for many a long day yet. A fellow can scarcely help painting and playing in Germany, one sees and hears so much of both; but unless he has far more talent than I have for either, he won't earn his bread by his brush or his violin. I really know very little about either one or the other."

And, gathering his sketches together, he returned them to his portfolio with an air of the most complete indifference, and then, at the earnest request of many combined voices, he took his place at the piano, and played and sang. Hope sat entranced. On ordinary occasions she herself was generally the chief performer in the little concerts; but to-day Victor's music was such a new delight to all, that it was not until he had played and sung for a great part of the afternoon, that Mary's voice was heard begging that Hope, too, would give them some music.

"She and Victor might lead the singing in some of those German hymns which Victor had sent to her, and which she herself had taught to Hope"—if that could be called teaching where the pupil was so much in advance of the teacher. At first Hope felt as if she never could summon courage to sing with him, but soon she forgot her shyness in the delight of singing with one who kept such perfect time and tune, and made every inflection of his own voice blend so harmoniously with hers, until at length, they two, being the only real musicians of the party, were singing duets together, and the others sat and listened until at last Victor declared he was too tired to play accompaniments any more, when Hope took his place, and he sang again solo after solo to her steady expressive playing.

That evening Victor and Mary Raymond walked part of the way back to Beaumanoir with Mademoiselle Mallerie and the girls. His first words as they turned homeward

were, "Well, I think you might have told me of the treat that you had in store for me on my return?"

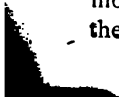
Mary laughed. "In making acquaintance with Hope Savile, you mean. I think I have told you, Victor, more than once, of the great pleasure it had been to me to have found a delightful friend for myself, in one of the little English girls whom Mademoiselle Mallerie had brought home to Beaumanoir."

"Little English girl!" exclaimed Victor. "Yes, certainly, you mentioned something of the sort; but, if I gave the matter any thought at all, I fancied your new pet was a child with flaxen hair and blue eyes, about as big as our H  l  ne."

Mary laughed again. "Are all English girls H  l  ne's age, Victor; and does it follow as a matter of course that because they are English they must have flaxen hair and blue eyes? If so, certainly Hope does not answer to the type."

"No," said Victor, enthusiastically, "that she certainly does not. I never saw such eyes in my life. Those long lashes give them such a wonderfully soft expression. My father talked about my being an artist to-day, and I told him how poor an one I was, but I'm quite artist enough to know how rare such beauty as that is. The effect of those dark eyes and that golden hair is something wonderful—for her hair is really golden. I've studied colour sufficiently to know the difference between the true golden hue, and the fair auburn which goes by the name. I tell you what, Mary, I must get that girl to sit to me. With such a model, I believe I shall be able at last to make a painting."

This time Mary Raymond laughed outright. "My dear Victor," she said, "do you imagine for a moment that Mademoiselle Mallerie would allow little Hope to sit as a model to you? If it were for no other reason than rousing the child's vanity, by leading her to think of her own beauty,



that would be quite enough to prevent Mademoiselle's consenting to such an absurd idea."

"I can't think why you call her little," replied Victor, in an irritable tone, "and speak of her as a child. She's a girl, and the most beautiful girl I've ever seen; and as for its being an absurd idea to paint a likeness of her, I've set my heart on doing it."

"Then, Victor, you had better take your heart off from that desire as soon as possible, since I can assure you beforehand of the utter impossibility of its ever being fulfilled."

"And pray why not? Don't beautiful girls sit for their pictures constantly?" asked Victor, speaking now still more irritably. "I should think this lovely *little* friend of yours had had hers taken more than once before now."

"No doubt she has, Victor. Indeed I know she has; Mademoiselle Mallerie was telling me only the other day of a picture that had been taken of her just before she left, and how lovely it was."

"And why should she not have another taken now?"

"That was taken for her father, Victor, as a remembrance of his child. I should think you could see how different a thing it would be for her to give up the time that she is spending in her education, and sit to a young amateur artist, merely as a study—a model of beauty."

Victor chose not to be convinced, and argued the matter in a provoking unreasonable way, until at length Mary lost patience, and said—

"I think, Victor, you talk great nonsense."

"I am sure you do," he replied.

And after that the brother and sister completed in silence the walk which had begun so pleasantly.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE the innocent cause of their differences of opinion returned to Beaumanoir with her young companions. She had been very silent during her walk home with Mary Raymond, Rose being with Elsie, and Victor with Mademoiselle Mallerie, whom he had found a most agreeable and intellectual companion. In spite of his annoyance on first starting at finding that the party was so arranged as to leave the four girls to keep each other company, while he fell to the share of the middle-aged governess, he had enjoyed his walk very much. He was a very talented young man, and as quick in his perceptions as he could be, when he chose, clear in his deductions, and, during the course of that mile and a half walk with Mademoiselle Mallerie, he had taken her measure very accurately, and recognized her to be a woman of great grasp of mind, as well as of high cultivation, yet without a touch of pedantry, or "blue-stockingism"—more ready to listen and glean fresh ideas and information, even from a young fellow like himself, than anxious to display any of her own attainments. She talked easily and cleverly, but not very much—evidently it was a greater pleasure to her to listen, with a willing and most intelligent sympathy; and the interest she had taken in his anecdotes of the German artists and German musicians with whom his love of art had thrown him into contact, had put him into the best of tempers, both with her and

with himself, until Mary threw him out of equilibrium by differing from him on the subject uppermost in his mind.

On returning to the house, Mademoiselle Mallerie went at once to see after her mother, and the girls were left alone in the oak-parlour.

Hope was still silent, and her silence had the effect of making the sympathetic Elsie also indisposed to talk.

Not so with Rose, however. Her tongue never stopped, and all her conversation turned on the same subject — Madame Raymond's grown up stepson — his manners, his probable age, his future prospects, his singing, his music, his drawing, his powers of conversation in French and German and English.

"I wonder how old he is," she said, addressing herself to Elsie. "I thought he must be quite young still, as they said he was studying in Germany, but he does not look young. He looks quite as old as your brother who came to the station with you the day we left London, and you said that he was twenty-two."

"Mr. Raymond is a year older than Arthur," said Elsie.

"Then he's twenty-three. How *do* you know?"

"He told me so," said Elsie.

"*Told* you so, did he?" exclaimed Rose, in the excited way which always irritated Hope beyond measure. "Why, I did not see him speak to you. It seemed to me he had eyes and ears for nobody but Hope."

An angry flush deepened the delicate colour in Hope's cheek, and her dark eyes glowed with an altogether different lustre from that which Victor Raymond had pronounced to be so soft in its brilliancy. She was about to speak, and had she done so it would have been to utter some scornful remark, for Hope could be cutting in her sarcasms at times; but Elsie, unperceived, laid a soft hand on hers, and their eyes met in sympathy. The look

and the action carried Hope's rapid mind back instantly to that morning's Communion, to the short address which had preceded it, every word of which had gone home to her mind. One sentence returned to it now—"In love and charity with your neighbours." She and Elsie had allowed to each other afterwards, as they walked to the Raymonds' together, that this duty just at this moment was harder to them than any other, on account of Rose. She was so very, very 'trying, especially to Hope, who declared that she always "rubbed her up the wrong way with her silly remarks, and her want of tact, and her foolish vanity, and her utter selfishness." During the ten minutes' walk that they had had together from the English chapel to the Raymonds' house, Elsie and Hope had spoken of this mutual trouble, not uncharitably or conceitedly, but humbly, recognizing how much that was wrong in themselves led to the difficulty they found in bearing patiently with Rose. The conversation had been ended by Elsie's looking at her friend with just the same sweet expression in her face that it wore now, and laying her hand on hers in the same soft, caressing manner as she said—

"Well, we must try, Hope. If we try, God will help us. We are so very happy at Beaumanoir—so happy with Mademoiselle and in our love for each other. Rose is really our only cross, and it is not a very heavy one to carry for His sake, who bore so much for us, is it?"

Now Elsie said nothing, but her look and action recalled those words and checked the angry expression that had risen to Hope's lips, and reproved the irritated feeling that had prompted it.

Rose saw, however, that she had succeeded in annoying Hope, and might have pushed her advantage further had not Mademoiselle Mallerie's return to the room prevented any more conversation on the same subject.

It was renewed, however, that evening between Elsie and Hope when they had retired to their rooms. The girls all had separate bedrooms; but Rose's opened into Mademoiselle Mallerie's, and Hope's and Elsie's into each other, and every evening there was a talk over the hair-brushing, which made this process a great delight to both. Years after, Hope looked back to these girlish talks, remembering many a little bit of advice from Elsie, not meant to be such, but just spoken out of the fulness of her heart's love and sympathy for her friend, which had not only been of the greatest use to her then, but which had remained with her all through her life, serving often to check the over eagerness or to restrain the quickness of temper, which were her natural characteristics.

"You were disposed to be hard on poor Rose this evening," was Elsie's first remark as, brush in hand, she gathered together the rich masses of golden hair which were, as Victor Raymond had remarked, of so rare a hue.

"I dare say I was, Elsie," Hope replied. "I felt so more than cross with her."

"So you seemed," said Elsie, "and I felt vexed too though, after all, there was not any harm in what she said. She was only commenting on the appearance of a stranger, and she did not say anything that was not perfectly true. Young Mr. Raymond is very handsome, I think. I never saw any one so good-looking. He has such an intellectual face, too, and such charming manners. Now then," she added, with a merry laugh—and Elsie's laughs, if rare, were singularly merry—"why don't you catch *me* up as you did Rose."

"Because you say it so differently. It's Rose's way of saying things that tries me, more than the things themselves. She's so silly. I know, too, I was feeling irritated with her even before she said a word. I do so hate her manner with gentlemen, don't you, Elsie?"

Elsie laughed again, but the expression of her face was grave even as she did so.

“‘In love and charity with your neighbours,’” she said ; “we have to remember that this is to be our motto from to-day, and that Rose is the special object towards whom you and I have to exercise this special duty. But yes, Hope, I do very much dislike her manner with gentlemen, and I was very much vexed with the way she went on to-day when Mademoiselle was not there. It was what Arthur calls flirting. Nothing makes *him* so angry as to see a girl flirt, especially a young girl like Rose. If any one had gone on with him to-day as Rose did with young Mr. Raymond, he would just have turned away and left her to herself. But Victor Raymond did not seem to object to it, judging from the way he laughed and answered her back.”

“He did not like her, though,” said Hope, quickly.

“How can you tell, Hope? He surely did not confide his first impressions of Rose to you on the first afternoon of your acquaintance.”

“No,” said Hope ; “but he laughed at her professing to be a ‘worshipper of painting,’ and then staring out of window when he was showing us those copies of Van Dyck ; and he made still more fun of her saying that she thought Mendelssohn’s music divine, and then whispering to Bertrand when he was in the middle of one of his loveliest passages, and playing it so exquisitely too.”

“Yes,” said Elsie, “he plays beautifully, and his paintings are lovely. He is most accomplished as well as handsome ; but I think we had better put him out of our minds altogether, if we are to end this day, as I am sure we shall both wish to have done, considering how it was begun. I am sorry Victor Raymond should just have happened to return yesterday, for we have had such a much less quiet Sunday

than usual at the Raymonds'. It was a pity he did not wait till to-morrow, as he said he so nearly did, was not it?"

Hope said, "Yes, she thought it *was* a pity." She could not, however, have said truthfully that she was sorry. That Sunday had been so much pleasanter than any other she had ever spent with the good silk-merchant's large family in his comfortable but somewhat unicturesque house in the centre of the town of Francheville.

It was long before she could get to sleep that night. The morning's solemn service had been strangely shut out of sight by the afternoon's excitement. She reproached herself for having allowed it to be so. She wished with all her heart that Mademoiselle Mallerie had *not* been obliged to visit her sick friend that afternoon, for then there might have been less music and singing and exhibiting of pictures. She accused herself of insincerity and half-heartedness, yet she was neither insincere nor half-hearted. The Hope Savile who had knelt at the altar that morning, with her golden head bent low in deepest reverence, and a chastened, humble expression over her sweet face, confessing her unworthiness and sinfulness in all heartiness, and renewing with greater fervour the solemn vow of her confirmation, was just as real and true a being as the Hope Savile who, with eyes bright with excitement and cheeks flushed with interest, had listened to that lovely music, and looked at those exquisite pictures in entire forgetfulness of all that had been occupying her so deeply only a few hours before. It was Hope's first experience in the changeful rapidity with which eager, impetuous characters like hers can pass from being the earnest, thoughtful creatures they desire to be in God's sight, into the light-hearted, perhaps careless, characters which their nature prompts them to become. Yet were none of the serious thoughts obliterated. They all returned again when—her evening prayers earnestly said,

with many wandering thoughts resolutely recalled, and pardon asked and she knew granted—the golden head was laid upon her pillow, and the long lashes closed over the dark eyes in sleep.

Hope's last thoughts were of the morning service, the prayers offered, and the resolutions made ; but she dreamed, not, as Rose declared next morning she had done, of Victor Raymond's handsome face, but that she was listening to song after song, sung in a rich, full voice with such feeling and expression as she had never heard before.

CHAPTER VIII.

DURING the month following Hope's confirmation the party at Beaumanoir saw a good deal of Victor Raymond—not nearly so much, indeed, as he himself would have liked, but considerably more than was agreeable to Mademoiselle Mallerie. For the first time since she had had the charge of young girls, she found it necessary to consider practically a question which theoretically had often occupied her mind, how far to allow unrestrained intercourse between her pupils and the young men of the various families with whom circumstances threw them into contact. The question was all the more serious to her, because, in the case of two out of her three pupils, it had been especially brought before her by their friends, when the girls had been placed under her charge. Moreover, she had undertaken the care of the three girls on the express understanding that Beaumanoir was not to be a school, and that they were to be allowed a certain freedom of action, and certain privileges of society, which would be a preparation for the social spheres into which they were all to enter very early in life.


"Hope's position on her return home will be a difficult one," Mrs. Savile had said to her in the course of that well-remembered conversation which, lying then upon her death-bed, she had held with Mademoiselle Mallerie; "she will be placed very early in life at the head of her father's house. She is very pretty and attractive. Her brother has many

young friends who will be constantly thrown with her. I long for her to be trained to discern between friendship and folly ; to have a mind so pure, and simple, and sensible that it will be proof against flattery and falseness, and whatever is unreal and dangerous."

Whilst Rose Prynne's uncle, in committing her to Mademoiselle Mallerie's care, had said, with the straightforward bluntness of a soldier, "I want you to make a sensible girl of her if you can. My poor brother has let her have a great deal too much freedom, and she's utterly unfit for school now. But if she can learn with you how to make good use of the liberty she must have when she returns to live with me, I shall be grateful indeed to you ; and, above all, teach her to make friends with young men without flirting with them, for that's what she will have to do when she comes to live with me, or she and I will soon fall out, for I'll have no flirting in my house."

Major Prynne held a military appointment in one of our largest garrison towns, and Rose was his orphan niece, whom he had lately adopted, somewhat to his regret ; for on her taking up her abode with him on her father's death, two years before, he had found her a very disturbing element in his quiet bachelor household, and governess after governess had been engaged and dismissed, until at last he was advised by his old friends the Saviles, to send her to France under the care of Mademoiselle Mallerie.


Had Mademoiselle Mallerie been asked to take charge of Rose Prynne in London, she would probably, after making inquiries into her character and circumstances, have declined to do so. But she never put from her a responsibility without well considering whether or not it was in her power to accept it—whether or not, indeed, it might not be a call from the Great Master Himself to do some special work for Him.



After much thought and prayer she had agreed to Major Prynne's proposal that Rose should go with her to Beaumanoir, where Elsie Gordon and Hope Savile would be her only fellow pupils. Both Mr. Savile and Major Prynne were paying her handsomely for what they knew to be exceptional advantages to their children. Elsie Gordon's education was the gift of her godmother, an old friend of Mademoiselle Mallerie's; but in many ways it was also a gift from Mademoiselle herself, for, knowing how limited her parents' circumstances were, she gave her many advantages for which neither they nor her godmother could have afforded to pay, but which would be of the greatest value to Elsie, who was being thus highly educated herself that she might educate others. Moreover neither Elsie nor Hope were likely to be injured by Rose's companionship, whilst she would be greatly benefited by theirs. Although Elsie was still so young, her character might be said to be formed. Home circumstances had doubtless greatly helped to its early maturity, for, from childhood, her position, as the eldest daughter and eldest sister in the large, rather poor, and very busy family of a hard-worked clergyman, had made her the right hand of both her parents, the confidant and counsellor of her brothers, the friend and playfellow of the little ones, the helper of the poor, and the comfort of the sorrowful. Young as she was, and without being either very clever or very pretty, she yet, by the simple force of her well-balanced character, the index to which could be read in her sweet contented expression and gentle composure of manner, so self-possessed, yet so entirely free from self-consciousness, exercised an influence over all for good. Hope, as we have seen, had had no early training, and her character offered, in many respects, a striking contrast to her friend's; but she possessed that in her very nature which was an effectual safeguard against her suffering

injury from the companionship of a girl like Rose. The purity of her mind, its perfect simplicity and guilelessness, led her to shrink instinctively from vanity and folly in the vulgar acceptation of the words. And yet, as we have said, Hope was vain. Remarks upon her appearance, or compliments of any kind were odious to her, and, although so highly gifted in many ways, there was not the smallest shade of conceit about her; yet she was eager for praise, if the praise only came from those whom she loved or admired, and even flattery might acquire a fatal influence over her, if administered with sufficient subtlety for its real nature to remain concealed. But a girl like Rose could never be to her anything but a source of irritation and intolerance. Mademoiselle Mallerie had known this from the first, and had become still more convinced of it lately.

Victor Raymond's appearance on the scene brought these weak points of Rose's ill-trained character into full exercise; but Mademoiselle Mallerie, distressed as she was to see in her an entire absence of those feelings of self-respect and delicacy, and those habits of reticence and dignity, on which every girl's future happiness so much depends, yet hoped to turn present events to good account in the correction and formation of Rose's character. She saw that the silly girl was prepared to establish with their new acquaintance one of those "foolish flirtations" which Major Prynne had informed her it was her delight to carry on, but she saw also that Victor Raymond was by no means disposed to become a party to this intention; and she hoped, by means of his intimacy with them, to lead even Rose to see how possible and pleasant it is for sensible friendships to exist without the least intermingling of that sentimental nonsense which so often makes silly girls the subject of ridicule to others, whilst it sometimes becomes a source of real trouble to themselves. Not that Mademoiselle Mallerie had never



until now sought to lead her young charges to form right opinions on this subject. On the contrary, it had been her constant endeavour—especially as regarded Hope and Rose, both handsome, motherless girls, who must be left early to their own control—to influence them rightly on a matter which, next to religion, was likely to be of more serious moment to them in their future lives than any other ; and she was not mistaken in believing that any foolish talking or jesting on the subject of love or love-making would have been as distasteful to Hope as to Elsie. With Rose she knew it was not so, and therefore she watched her carefully, though so quietly that Rose herself was quite unconscious of any surveillance.

Meanwhile there were pleasant parties to the woods and tea-drinkings at the farms, in which, as usual, the Raymonds joined, Victor always making one of the party. During former visits to Francheville, it had not been his habit to bestow so much of his company upon his step-brothers and sisters ; but these holidays he found a new attraction to their society in their friendship with the party at Beaumanoir, and, as if purposely to afford him the opportunity of enjoying it, his sister Mary had been summoned away from home to nurse an aunt in a serious illness almost directly after his arrival, and Victor sought for companionship with the junior members of the family and their intimate friends at Beaumanoir. His presence amongst them was quite a new element in their enjoyments. Never before had Bertrand and Theodore, Cecile, Emilie, Hélène, and little Paul realized what a delightful companion their brother Victor was—how clever at planning excursions, how thoughtful in providing for their comfort and watching over their safety. His lovely singing was no longer a thing only to be heard from their beds at night, or on Sunday afternoons, for one of the chief delights of every excursion was to gather round him in some

shady nook whilst he sang German, French, and English songs to their unfailing delight. His paintings also had been very little pleasure to the younger ones until now, when one of their great amusements had become to stand beside him watching him sketching bits of the surrounding scenery, or to form themselves into groups for him to draw. Victor smiled to himself sometimes as he introduced Hope's figure into these sketches, and remembered his dispute with Mary some weeks ago. But he said nothing of them to her now, nor did he in his rare letters make any mention of these novel expeditions with the children.

Strange to say, Hope also, in writing to Mary, never mentioned Victor's name. Her letters were frequent, for Hope had an innate love of letter-writing, and talent for it. She described the walks and the picnics, but without mentioning Victor, or the friendship which he had established with the Beaumanoir party, and which went on so pleasantly that Mademoiselle Mallerie no longer wished that his return home had occurred three months later, as had been at first intended; for in August Hope was to go to England for six weeks, and the two other girls were to spend the holidays with Mademoiselle at some baths at a distance.

Perhaps we should not have said that Victor had established a friendship with the Beaumanoir party, for there was one exception, and that one was Elsie Gordon. Mademoiselle Mallerie admired his talents and rare accomplishments, and Madame Mallerie declared him to be the most considerate young man she had ever seen—and certainly there was something very touching in his attentions to the old lady. Rose pronounced him openly to be fascinating, and Hope was inwardly angry with herself for feeling that he was so; but Elsie felt that, notwithstanding all his gifts of mind and person, there was a something about him which, to her, would have been a bar to friendship. But she had never

expressed this opinion, even to Hope, until one day a very strange event happened, this strange event being a quarrel—an actual quarrel between Elsie Gordon and Rose Pryne.

Hope had gone with Mademoiselle to Francheville for her music lesson, her musical attainments being too high to allow of her being, as the other girls were, a pupil of Mademoiselle's; and Rose and Elsie were taking advantage of Mademoiselle's absence to finish a piece of work for her birthday, when it had been a long established custom that her pupils should give her something of their own making—the only present she would ever consent to receive from them. The conversation had turned, or we should rather say Rose had turned the conversation, on the Raymond family, and on Victor Raymond in particular; and some very foolish remarks from Rose, which Elsie vainly attempted to check, had so irritated her that at last she said, more sharply than Rose had ever heard her speak before—

“Oh, pray don't let us hear any more of Victor Raymond. You talk of him until one is tired of his very name.”

Delighted at having for once succeeded in rousing the “little saint,” as she called Elsie, Rose made the most of her advantage.

“I know you can't bear to hear Victor Raymond praised,” she continued, in a tone which would have provoked a far more advanced saint than poor Elsie; “and I know the reason too. Any one can see why you don't like him. It's just because he admires me, and admires Hope, and takes so little notice of you. Your vanity is wounded by his want of attention. Mademoiselle said one day that there is quite as much vanity in feeling wounded because one does *not* receive attention, as in being vain of the attentions one *does* receive; and I'm sure I agree with her. For my part, I believe that plain people are ten times vainer than pretty ones.”

Her tone was yet more insulting than her words, as she cast a half-pitying, half-contemptuous glance at Elsie, and then looked complacently at herself in the mirror. The colour mounted into Elsie's cheeks, and she lost command of her temper.

"You are a rude, vulgar-minded girl," she exclaimed; "and because you are eaten up with vanity yourself, you think every one else must be so too."

And throwing down the work at which she was helping Rose, she left the room by the inner glass door into the corridor, a minute before Hope, who had that instant returned from Francheville, entered it by the outer door.

"Where's Elsie?" she asked.

It was always Hope's first question.

"She was here until about a minute ago," replied Rose with a provoking little laugh, "when something offended the sweet saint, and she went off in a rage. Yes," she continued, remarking the expression on Hope's face, "in a rage. If you have never had the pleasure of seeing that charming sight, it's a pity you did not come in a minute or two sooner, for then you would have seen something new. There's her work now, thrown on the floor just where she left it; you can pick it up and take it to her. She'll tell you all about it, no doubt."

But this Elsie declined to do. There were the marks of tears on her face when, after a few minutes' delay, she unlocked her door to admit Hope, but her voice was sweeter than ever; there was certainly no rage in it, only great humility and sorrow, as she said—

"We will not talk about it, Hope. It was all my fault, and I am very, very sorry. I lost my temper and spoke very wrongly. If it had been with you I should not be half as much distressed, but Rose will not soon forget it, and it may do real harm." And then she added, "Please leave

me to myself for a little while, Hope, and promise me that you will not say a word to Rose. If she says anything to you, remember that it is *I* that am to blame."

Hope promised her and left her.

She did not however return to the oak-parlour, for as she passed down the corridor she saw through the glass door that Rose was still there, not now working—indeed, she could not have gone on working without Elsie's assistance—but sitting idle, with a most triumphant expression of countenance. To have gone into the room would probably have rendered it impossible to keep her promise to Elsie; so she passed on into the garden, and having gathered a bunch of flowers was arranging them in the 'salle-à-manger,' when the first bell rang, and with a punctuality most unusual to her, Rose came into the room. The expression of her countenance told Hope exactly what was passing in her mind, and made it quite easy for her now to keep the silence which she had before felt so tempted to break. She was not anxious either to gratify Rose's curiosity, or to give her the opportunity she evidently desired of provoking a quarrel. But before Rose could either ask any questions or make any remarks, Elsie herself entered the room. Her face was paler than usual, and there were dark rims round her eyes; but the sweet smile about her mouth was still there, and Hope long remembered the gentle look in her large grey eyes, and the tender humility of her voice, as she went straight up to Rose and said—

"I have come to ask you to forgive me, Rose. I am very sorry I lost my temper just now."

Rose was taken by surprise, and for a moment her cheek flushed, but not with shame. The generosity of Elsie's soul found no response in hers.

"Oh, you needn't ask *my* pardon," she said, with a quick laugh; "I like Mr. Raymond very much and admire him

too, but I'm not so fond of him that I want to quarrel with any one for abusing him. I've battles enough to fight on my own account not to care to take up the cudgels in his defence."

"Oh, it isn't that," said Elsie; "I only wanted to tell you that I was sorry I had lost my temper, and I'm sorry too that I said anything at all about Mr. Raymond."

Perhaps it was as well that at this moment Jeannette rang the second bell for tea, a sound which had never been known to conclude without Mademoiselle Mallerie being at her place at the head of the tea-table. One glance at the girls, such a quiet glance that it was unperceived by any of them, showed her that something more than usual was occupying their minds, but she took no notice. On the contrary, she at once diverted their thoughts by entering into an account of the afternoon's expedition to Francheville, introducing topics which would interest both Elsie and Rose. Evidently, whatever was the cause of excitement, Elsie had a principal share in it; and this being the case, Mademoiselle knew that whatever she ought to know about it, she might rest quite sure she would be told.

As she heard nothing on the subject it passed from her mind altogether, and so it did from Rose's. But not from Hope's.

It was a disappointment to her that Elsie made no sign of returning to the subject over the hair-brushing that evening, but since Elsie made no allusion to it, she felt that she must. So, it not being in Hope's nature to beat about the bush, or to approach any subject save in the most direct manner, she said abruptly:

"Elsie, why did you abuse Victor Raymond to-day?"

"I did not abuse him, Hope," Elsie replied, "though I would not contradict Rose when she asserted that I did, for that would only have been to renew the dispute which ought never to have taken place."

"But you must have said something against him. Why were you talking about him at all?"

"Why, indeed, Hope? That is a question I can answer. Because we were both very silly."

"Rose is always silly," said Hope, "especially about Victor Raymond; I wonder you let her speak of him to you. Do tell me how it happened."

"No," said Elsie, "it's much better all forgotten. I don't mean to say a word more on the subject, so you need not ask me, Hope."

"Well," persisted Hope, "you may as well tell me one thing. Did you really say you did not like him?"

"I don't remember exactly saying that, Hope. If I did, it was very wrong of me."

"But *don't* you like him?" asked Hope, eagerly.

In spite of her self-reproaches at having spoken as she had of him to Rose, and her resolutions to say no more about him, Elsie could not help answering—

"Not altogether, Hope."

"But why not?" persisted Hope; "he's so clever and kind and agreeable."

"Yes," said Elsie, "I know he's all that, and a great deal more—he's very brave and very courteous; but I don't know, Hope, but sometimes he does not seem to me to be very *true*, and I don't think I could ever really like any one who was not quite—quite true."

The quick flush on Hope's cheek, the sudden glow in her dark eyes surprised Elsie, who did not know that, in that instant of time, her friend's mind had been carried back to another scene very different from the present one. Again she was sitting by her darling mother's bedside; again she saw the pleading look on her dear face; again she heard the low earnest tones in which she had said to her, with what was almost her dying breath :

"Promise me, Hope, that you will not make a friendship with any one who is not true—quite, quite true."

But of this she had never spoken to any one, nor could she speak of it now, even to Elsie.

"But why should you not think him true?" she said, after a pause, which Elsie did not in the least understand, but which led, perhaps, to her replying to the question more fully than she might otherwise have done.

"Perhaps I used too strong an expression, Hope. What I mean is that Mr. Raymond has a way of colouring things; when he tells a story, the thing does not seem exactly like what it really is, but what he means it to appear to be."

"That is because he has such a lively imagination, and looks at everything in such a poetical light," replied Hope.

Elsie smiled.

"Perhaps it is; but I think that people of lively imagination and a poetical turn of mind, as you call it, Hope, should exercise their gifts on fancies, and should create stories out of their own fertile brains, and not distort facts until they really are *not* facts, but mere fictions."

"You are so matter-of-fact," said Hope; and then, remembering Elsie's love of poetry, and also recalling a statement which Mademoiselle had made only that morning to the effect that there was more exercise of true imagination in Elsie's compositions than in Hope's, she added, "at least, you are so *very* particular about exaggeration."

"I wish I were more so," said Elsie. "I think the temptation to exaggerate is such a very strong one when we know that, by adding just a little to the truth, we can make something quite interesting that is not a bit so, and can amuse people with our conversation and make time pass pleasantly, which is dragging rather heavily."

"And you think Mr. Raymond exaggerates, that is why you do not consider him quite true."

"Not only that, Hope ; I think he makes promises and forgets to fulfil them, and I think, too, that he is not *quite* the same to people when they are present that he is when they are absent. I have often been struck with the difference between him and Arthur in all these respects."

The conclusion of her speech was unfortunate. Hope seized her advantage at once.

"That is why you don't like him," she said quickly, "you compare every one with Arthur, and if they don't come up to the same degree of perfection, you pass judgment on them."

Hope spoke in the impatient tone in which she often addressed herself to Rose, but so rarely to Elsie that the quick tears rose to her friend's eyes.

"You are right, Hope," she said gently, "comparisons are odious. I ought not to have made any, for no one person has the same faults or the same virtues, and Arthur is so very different from Mr. Raymond. I know he has his faults too, of course, but they are very different."

"You *do* think *him* true?" said Hope, in a tone which Elsie did not quite understand. She was not sure whether it was inquiring or sarcastic, for Hope when ruffled was a little given to sarcasm : it was one of the weak points in her character, a weakness of which, happily, she was aware, and which she earnestly desired to conquer, since, as she knew, few things can be more utterly opposed to the spirit of Christianity than the spirit of sarcasm.

"Yes," Elsie answered ; "Arthur is quite, quite true. I should say, Hope, that truth was his chief characteristic. He is so good, so really religious, that of course that would make him perfectly truthful ; but setting aside his religion, he has such a true nature. Father says he was just the same when he was quite a little boy : that he never knew him ever to attempt to deceive. He hates all sham, and never says one

word more than is perfectly true, and I never heard him promise anything without fulfilling his promises, though he is not much given to making promises. His way is to *do* everything for everybody without saying anything at all about it—oh, Hope, he is so good. You would not wonder at my loving him as I do, if you only knew what he has been to me; how he has influenced me for good and kept me from evil all my life, how he first led me really to wish to do right, and especially how he has always made me admire truth, and long to be as true as he is.”

The eagerness with which Elsie spoke brought the pink colour into her pale cheeks and the light into her large grey eyes, changing her, as excitement always had the effect of doing, from an ordinary looking girl into a very pretty one. Hope's generous heart reproached her for the injustice of her irritability.

She turned to Elsie and gave her a quick kiss.

“If Arthur has made you what you are, my old darling,” she said, “I don't wonder you're very grateful to him; I'm sure other people ought to be, for you're the dearest thing in the world, though you *do* take some cranky notions into your head sometimes, as you have now about Mr. Raymond.”

“Oh, don't let us talk any more about Mr. Raymond,” said Elsie, smiling.

And then she added more gravely—

“I hope you won't consider it another of my ‘cranky notions,’ Hope, but I really do think that we have talked too much of him lately.”

“Not I, Elsie, I am sure,” exclaimed Hope. Which was true, for Hope rarely mentioned his name. A moment's reflection showed Elsie that she did not.

“No,” she said, “I don't think you do talk of him, Hope. But really Rose talks of little else when Mademoiselle is not there, and somehow I think we have all got into the way of

thinking too much about him. He has been a new interest in our lives, and I *do* think him very interesting, whether I altogether like him or not ; and don't you think, Hope, that one is apt to get too much excited—in thought, even—about new interests?"

Hope did not answer. Elsie thought that the subject did not interest her. No doubt she was tired after her afternoon at Francheville. They had indeed been talking too long, and had better both get ready quickly for bed.

So to bed they went, but only one of them to sleep. Elsie little knew how deep an impression her words had made on her friend's mind.

The cuckoo in the hall came out of its little niche in the carved oak clock and sang out one quarter of an hour after another far on into the night, and still Hope lay awake. It was not until the first rays of the rising sun had flooded the room with light, and the singing of the birds amidst the ivy of the old ruins had put the cuckoo's imitations to shame, that Hope fell asleep, and dreamed strange confused dreams in which her mother and Elsie and Victor Raymond and Arthur Gordon were all mingled together.

CHAPTER IX.

THE day before Hope's return to England arrived, and all the Raymonds were to spend the last evening at Beaumanoir.

Miss Lucilla Savile had found a desirable escort for her niece on the journey in an English lady, an old acquaintance of hers at Wallingford, who had been spending some weeks at Francheville. She had written to introduce Hope to her a few days previously, and Mrs. Sullivan had been so charmed with her that she had been eager in entering into the arrangement, and had made the kindest plans to further it. The train by which they were to travel started at three o'clock in the morning, and it had been proposed that Mademoiselle Mallerie and Hope should sleep at the Raymonds' to obviate the necessity of a long drive at night, but Mrs. Sullivan would not hear of this. She insisted on Hope's coming to her hotel the night before, and occupying the dressing-room adjoining her own room, and thus it was settled.

The parting with her friends at Beaumanoir was not to be a long one; in two months Hope would be once more with them. Moreover she was going home—or at least she was going to those nearest and dearest to her, for her return was to be to a new house at Westbourne, a new and handsome house, which had been taken on a long lease and had been furnished, Miss Lucilla Savile wrote, in the most

delightful fashion. Hope had never seen this place—Marylands it was called—and she did not at all fancy her aunt's descriptions of it, so that it scarcely seemed like going home ; but at all events she was going back to her father and to Frank, who had returned from the Continent soon after she had gone to Francheville, and had lately obtained his commission. Hope had a very real longing to see them both again, and yet her heart was very heavy on this last evening. If Elsie had been going with her, as they had once hoped might be the case, it would have been different. The first plan had been for the two girls to have returned to England together, and spent the whole of their holidays with each other, Elsie staying with Hope at Westbourne for the first month, and Hope spending the last month with Elsie in her father's rectory at Ashford. But this plan had fallen through so far as Elsie's return to England and sojourn at Westbourne were concerned, for it was still settled that Hope should go to Ashford for a visit before returning to France.

Both the girls had greatly felt the disappointment of their first pleasant prospects. And on this last evening Hope was downcast. She dreaded the long journey with a stranger, for she was a shy girl, notwithstanding her freedom from self-consciousness or personal vanity. She had never been accustomed to a wide circle of friends, and though she was talkative, and to a certain point unreserved with those amongst whom she lived, she was reserved with strangers ; and this journey with Mrs. Sullivan, commencing as it was to do with a night in her dressing-room, seemed to her a very formidable affair. Moreover, she greatly dreaded the life before her at Westbourne. Aunt Lucilla was mistress in her father's house, and was to remain so until Hope left school altogether and took her own position at home. When that time should come, Hope, who dearly loved to form plans, purposed carrying out all sorts of changes in her

father's household ; but until then she knew that she must be content with aunt Lucilla's style of living, with which past experience had made her well acquainted. She often said to herself that had her mother seen as much of her aunt Lucilla as she had, she might perhaps not have been as reconciled as she seemed to be to the idea of her taking her place as mistress of the house and companion to Mr. Savile. But of this she said nothing. Hope possessed the loyalty of a noble nature, and not even to Elsie did she ever speak of her aunt's weaknesses, though the girls talked often together of the temptations that must of necessity be Hope's in a life such as she would lead at Westbourne.

They were to have a last long talk together this evening ; but, as is usually the case on last evenings, there was no time for carrying out any proposed plans.

One and another came to say good-bye.

Hope did not know what warm friends she had made amongst the neighbours until one came with flowers, and another with a pot of her favourite honey, and all were sorry to see her go, and eager that she should come back soon.

The farewells were scarcely over, and the packing only just completed, when the second tea-bell rang, sending a very sick feeling to Hope's heart as she thought that nearly two months must pass before she heard it again ; and, with what Dr. Andrewes used to call the "peach bloom" on her cheek deepened by excitement to rose colour, and her dark eyes lustrous with deep feeling, she went down with Elsie into the "salle-à-manger," to find the rest of the home party and all the Raymond family already assembled round the long table.

No, not all the Raymonds.

Madame was there, and Bertrand and Theodore, and Cecile, and Emilie and Hélène, and even little Paul, who was Hope's special pet, and had been allowed to come thus late in her honour. But not Victor. Madame Raymond explained

that he had been obliged to remain at home that evening to help her husband to entertain some English gentlemen, who were coming on business, "connected," she added, "with the branch house of their firm in Wallingford, a large manufacturing town now, I believe?" she said, turning to her sister.

"Wallingford!" said Mademoiselle Mallerie; "you have have come to the right place for information about Wallingford. Hope spent the early years of her life there. Her grandfather's house was at Wallingford. I believe it has been converted into one of these very silk factories—has it not, Hope?"

Hope said "Yes."

But she was unable to give them any more information about the place or people than they already possessed. She could only tell them what Mademoiselle knew already, that she had been brought up in the old-fashioned house which since Mr. Clifden's death had been sold for a factory, and that her aunt Lucilla also possessed a little property in the suburbs of Wallingford, which was let. Her aunt had tried to sell it, but it was at the "wrong end of the town," away from the river, on the banks of which factory after factory was being built, and she had not succeeded in disposing of it.

And there the conversation dropped.

The very name of Wallingford, however, had carried Hope back to those early days of her childhood, when in her merry moods she rode on hollyhocks with Frank up and down the old garden walks, or let him swing her higher than the trees in the paddock; or in her graver ones watched the moon from her bedroom window, and listened to the sounds from the town, or read her fairy tales and story-books, and dreamed dreams by fire-light, after it had grown too dark to see, on those long winter evenings when her grandfather slept in his arm-chair, and she was afraid to ring for candles lest she should make him very cross for the rest of the evening by waking him, and Frank still

more cross by disturbing his amusements in the servants' hall.

It was a curious coincidence—one of those curious coincidences which are perpetually occurring in this interwoven life of ours, making us feel as if even the very smallest things could scarcely be a matter of chance—that she should thus have the old life at Wallingford brought back to her memory just as she was on the eve of returning to those with whom she had been associated there. These remembrances did not seem, however, to have the effect of cheering her, for certainly she was very sad when the “fiacre” drove to the door which was to convey her to Mrs. Sullivan’s hotel and that dreaded bed in the dressing-room.

The Raymonds prepared to leave at the same time. Bertrand and Theodore were in high satisfaction at being appointed for the first time to escort Madame Raymond and their elder sisters home without either their father or their elder brother. The younger girls and little Paul were in still greater delight, for they were to drive in the “fiacre” with Hope, a treat which little Paul wondered at Hope not seeming to anticipate as much as he did himself. The old Beaumanoir manservant who was to see them safe, and to book Hope’s luggage at the railway station, mounted the box of the cab, the good-byes were said, and they drove off. Nobody seemed to think it was anything so very painful to be parting for two months except Hope herself, and poor Elsie. It required all her stock of self-control, great as it was, to stand at that porch so quietly, and to give the last kiss and the last wave of the hand in the clear light of the summer moon; and she made no attempt whatever at self-control when she found herself in her own room, and gave way to such a fit of crying as would have astonished those who only knew Elsie Gordon in her self-possession.

Meanwhile Paul’s ceaseless chatter was driving Hope

nearly wild, and she found it utterly impossible even to listen to the questions which Emilie and Hélène asked continually. At last, finding they received no answers, they confined their conversation to each other, and left Hope alone. Though it was such a lovely summer night, the drive was not as pleasant to the children as they had expected. It was rather a relief to them when they stopped at their own door; and Hope breathed more freely during the few minutes that passed before the cab stopped again at the large gate of the hotel, and she was shown up to the "salon" where Mrs. Sullivan was awaiting her.

Preoccupied as she was, and very shy, she yet appreciated the kindness which had prepared a nice little supper for her; and the sweet way in which she thanked Mrs. Sullivan—the half-sorrowful, half-timid look in her large soft eyes, and the gentle tremor in her musical voice as she said she "was very much obliged, but she could not take anything, indeed she could not; but yes, she would like very much to go to bed at once"—completed the conquest she had already more than half made of Mrs. Sullivan's heart. She was a widow, who long years ago had lost her only child, a tiny little baby girl, with dark eyes and small delicate features. From that day to this she had never ceased to mourn her loss, and to form foolish, useless fancies as to what little Eugénie might have been like, had she lived to be the pride and comfort to her that other girls are to their mothers. The thought had struck her when first she had seen Hope that perhaps her Eugénie might have been just such another lovely creature as she was; and now it returned to her, and made her voice and manner very motherly and tender as she took Hope to her room, and herself gave orders to her maid to attend to her comfort.

But Hope declined the offered help graciously—"She was accustomed to do everything for herself."

So Mrs. Sullivan wished her good-night and left her.

"A very lovely young lady, ma'am," was her maid's remark.

"Very, Preston."

"And she has no mamma, I think you said, ma'am; dear me! how proud her mamma would be if she were alive. One does not often see any one so pretty as that."

Her mistress did not answer, and the maid—who knew nothing of the baby daughter, which Mrs. Sullivan had herself laid in its little coffin, amidst the lilies of the valley and the maiden-hair ferns which her own hands had arranged, and which were watered by her day by day with many tears until at last the lid was laid over them, which shut out from her sight for ever upon earth the tiny face which they surrounded—wondered why she was so silent. She was dismissed early, but not because her mistress had a short night in prospect and a fatiguing journey next day, and was anxious for bed, for Mrs. Sullivan sat long at her dressing-table, not doing anything at all, but asking herself over and over again those questions which it is so worse than foolish ever to ask at all. Why should that lovely girl's mother have been taken from her, when she was so much needed to cherish and to guide her? Why should she be left a childless widow, when it would have been such a life-long delight to her to have brought up her lovely little Eugénie? Why, indeed? Why should the rich man's only son be laid in his grave, and the poor man's ten children be left to cry for bread?

So long did Mrs. Sullivan sit thinking before her table, that, at one o'clock, it scarcely seemed worth while to go to bed, to be aroused again at half-past two; so she wrapped a shawl around her, and lay down to rest on the sofa, little dreaming as she did so, that her young charge had not yet closed her eyes either.

But full as Mrs. Sullivan's mind had been of Hope, not one thought had Hope given her. She could think only of Beaumanoir and her friends there, and it was not until after Mrs. Sullivan had gone off for an hour's sleep on her couch that Hope's eyes closed in the sound sleep from which Preston's voice startled her, telling her it was time to dress quickly or they would be too late for the train. They happened, however, to reach the station nearly ten minutes too early, as was always the case when Preston had the direction of affairs, she being one of those not very rare individuals who live in a constant dread of being too late for whatever they have to do. Mrs. Sullivan sent Preston to see about the luggage, and she and Hope were sitting waiting in the cab when, to the surprise of both, a gentleman came up to the window, and taking off his hat to Mrs. Sullivan, held out his hand to Hope.

"I missed seeing you last night," he said, "but I could not let you go without wishing you good-bye."

"Oh, how kind!" exclaimed Hope.

Her face was flushed with the pleasure of her surprise; but this Mrs. Sullivan could not see, they were sitting in the shade. The light from the railway station fell on Victor Raymond's face, and Mrs. Sullivan was quite as struck, although not as touched by his good looks, as she had been with Hope's beauty on the previous evening. Also she was struck with the charm of his manner and voice, as with a light musical laugh, he replied—

"Kind! to myself, yes. Besides, I have a favour to ask of you. I understand you will see my sister this evening. Will you give her this letter from my father. It is on rather important business. We shall be very glad if it can reach her earlier than it could do by post."

Then, turning to Mrs. Sullivan, with that courteous deference which is so attractive when shown by young people

to their elders, and which had already won for him the good opinion both of Mademoiselle Mallerie and her mother, he added : "Mrs. Raymond tells me you have promised to see my sister this evening, so that I hope my little commission will not cause you any trouble."

Mrs. Sullivan knew now who he was. She replied that they were sure to see Miss Raymond. She had promised Mademoiselle Mallerie that she would take Hope to see her friend, and they had an appointment with her at her aunt's house that evening.

Victor, however, seemed in no hurry to give the letter into Hope's charge, but remained talking, Mrs. Sullivan observing meanwhile, with some amusement, the anxiety in poor Preston's face as she stood just behind him, evidently fully persuaded that this time they must miss their train.

At length the bell rang, and Mrs. Sullivan said,

"I think we had better take our places."

Victor Raymond saw them into their carriage, but it was only at the last moment that he took from his breast pocket, and handed to Hope, not one, but two letters. An instant after the train started, and left him standing, hat in hand, on the platform. Hope held the letters in her hand, and her face was crimson. Mrs. Sullivan perceived this also, and she saw, by the expression of her countenance, that Preston did so too. Victor had only made mention of one letter, why had he given Hope two?

The train had moved out of the station, and it was too dark still to have read it; but even had it not been, she could not have opened it with Mrs. Sullivan sitting beside her and Preston opposite with a pair of prying eyes fixed on her. After a little while, however, these same eyes closed in sleep; Mrs. Sullivan's vigil told upon her, and she slept also. Day dawned, and Hope, feeling herself alone, summoned courage to take from her bag and to open the letter addressed to herself.

Why should Victor write to her? What could the letter be about?

It was a poetical effusion on the subject of hope, a play upon her name; but such a graceful play, every line so full of carefully concealed compliment, that even Hope, sensitively fastidious as she was, could not feel offended, but only very much flattered, and more gratified and excited than she herself knew. There was nothing of a love-letter about it. Indeed, it was not a letter at all. Had it been, Hope would have felt at once that Mr. Raymond ought not to have written it, and that she must not receive it. But this pretty, graceful poem—just a poem on hope, evidently written by himself, with an exquisite little painting at the end—it was just like his kind thoughtfulness to give her this little remembrance of the pleasant weeks they had spent together. She had never been so much pleased with any present. She would keep it all her life. It should lie amongst her treasures, with the lock of her mother's hair, and her dear Indian letters in her dressing-case.

And having come rapidly to these conclusions, she was about to restore the paper to its former place in her travelling-bag, when, raising her eyes, she met those of Preston fixed upon her with such a strange expression in them that, although she did not in the least understand its meaning, her own fell before them, and the colour in her cheeks, the tint of which was already raised by the excitement of her feelings, once more deepened to a crimson blush.

But an instant after she had forgotten Preston and the unpleasant expression of her face. Her letter, or rather her poem, occupied her entirely; and her little foolish heart beat fast at the thought of a man like Mr. Raymond, who had won the prize poem at the German University, who had obtained the gold medal at the *Conversatoire de Musique*, and whose painting at the last exhibition had stood first on

the list of students at the Academy, writing this poem, and painting this flower for her, and getting up in the middle of the night to present it to her.

Hope did not find the time at all dull, though Mrs. Sullivan did not wake, and Preston, much to Hope's satisfaction—for she had formed one of her rapid dislikes to her—went to sleep again, and the country through which they passed was very uninteresting.

As they drew near the town however where they were to rest for the night Hope grew uneasy, lest after all she should be disappointed of her visit to Mary Raymond, for the sky began to form itself into a heavy mass of cloud, tinged at its edges with deep red, and betokening a thunderstorm.

Before they had reached their destination, the storm had begun, peal after peal of thunder broke over them, and the flashes of lightning blazed over the high, narrow streets.

Hope had never thought a storm unwelcome before, but now her heart failed her, not with fear at the crash of the thunder, or the fierce gleams of the forked lightning as it descended in fiery zig-zags, for storms always inspired her with a sort of mental excitement which was pleasant to her nature, but at the thought that her letter for Mary would probably have to be consigned to the post after all. Kind as Mrs. Sullivan evidently was, she could not expect her to take a long drive on such an evening as this, merely that she might spend an hour with her friend, and that Mary Raymond might receive her father's letter a few hours earlier than she would do by post.

Preston meanwhile was busy thinking of the same subject. She disliked and dreaded storms quite as much as Hope enjoyed them, and she was fully determined that her mistress should not take this young lady to pay a country visit on such a night as this if she could prevent it, for, if her mistress went, doubtless she would have to go also.

CHAPTER X.

THE thunder and lightning had ceased, and the rain was falling in torrents when they reached the station. As they drove to the hotel, water-spouts seemed to be dashing over the cab, and pouring off into deep streams along the streets; but by the time they had taken off their travelling things, the heavy rain had stopped, the pale evening sun was shining beneath the clouds, and it promised to be a calm evening.

Mrs. Sullivan had retained the cabman to tell him that if the rain cleared off she would want him again in an hour; but Preston, finding herself alone with her mistress, resolved to make an effort to dissuade her from any more travelling that day. As is so often the case when people make efforts from self-interested motives, pretending to be anxious for others, when at heart only caring for themselves, the means she took to gain her object only led to its frustration.

"You will not think of going out again this evening, ma'am?" she said.

"Yes, Preston. I have some business which will take me to a village about a mile and a half from here."

"So I understood, ma'am, but surely you will not think of going. The weather is not at all settled; besides, your travelling cloak is wet through, and you will surely take cold if you go without it. You have only your shawl, and it is not nearly so warm."

"I must go, Preston, if I possibly can. I promised I would take Miss Savile."

Preston's lip curled.

"Well, ma'am, perhaps I ought not to say so, but really, ma'am, I think you are much too kind in putting yourself out as you do for *that* young lady."

Mrs. Sullivan turned quickly, and asked her, rather sharply, what she meant.

"Well, ma'am, all I mean is that it does not seem to me as if the young lady quite deserved all the trouble you have taken about her. A young lady—such a *very* young lady as she is too, ma'am—to receive letters from a gentleman and hide them away in her bag, and then open them when you and I are asleep, ma'am, and turn as red as a peony when I wake up and catch her reading them—well, ma'am, it does not seem to me quite—quite—quite what you would like a young lady of your own to do."

Preston's words took Mrs. Sullivan so much by surprise that she had concluded her speech before her mistress had sufficiently understood its meaning to check her in it, which she now did very decidedly. But Preston saw, to her satisfaction, that her words had taken effect, and was quite unaware that that effect had been exactly opposite to what she had desired.

If her little Eugénie *had* been in Hope's circumstances, and if *she* had been, as Hope's mother was, removed to an unknown land where she had no longer power to guide her—well, she would do all for Hope that she would have desired that some good, christian, motherly heart might have done for Eugénie.

"We must not lose any unnecessary time in reaching your friend's house," she said to Hope as they rose from the supper-table, much to Hope's delight and to Preston's disgust.

Hope never forgot that drive, either to or from the country house where Mary Raymond was nursing her invalid aunt.

The evening was calm and still, with the peculiar stillness that follows a storm, and their road lay through pretty scenery along the banks of a river ; and as Hope sat admiring and content beside her she looked so sweet and innocent, that Mrs. Sullivan—still thinking of Eugénie—reproached herself for having even allowed Preston's remarks to find a place in her memory. And yet, had she not herself felt uneasy when that handsome young man had asked Hope to give one letter to his sister, and she had seen him put two letters into her hand.

On their arriving at the house the servant informed them that Miss Raymond had not expected them. She had thought the storm would prevent their coming, but she would call her directly ; she was only in the garden summer-house. If the ladies would walk in she would fetch her directly.

Hope inquired if she were alone.

"Yes," the girl said, "quite alone."

"Then," said Hope, turning quickly to Mrs Sullivan, "may I go with the maid to call her? If she does not expect us it will be such a surprise to see me."

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Sullivan, "and do not hurry to return. Your friend will like to have you all to herself. We only came to escort you. Preston and I can wait as long as you like."

But this the polite little servant would not allow. The ladies must come into the house. There was no one there, for her mistress was not well enough to leave her room. She would show them into the "salon," and then take the young lady to Mademoiselle Raymond.

So Mrs. Sullivan and Preston—a grand lady also in the eyes of the little white-capped and short-petticoated French

girl—were ushered into the “salon,” and Hope tripped lightly after Nannette along the straight garden walk to the “berceau,” where she interrupted Mary in her work of arranging fruit by throwing her arms round her in a loving embrace.

A few words having explained all, Nannette was despatched with a dish of fruit to the house to offer it with wine and biscuits to the ladies, whilst Mary kept Hope with her for a quarter of an hour. “She must have her all to herself for one quarter of an hour.”

But the quarter of an hour became half an hour, and a very eventful half-hour it was to Hope, for during that time she parted with the poem which had already become so precious to her.

Hope had given Mary the letter from Mr. Raymond, and Mary had put it into her pocket, saying that her short time with Hope was too precious to allow of her opening it now.

Something in Hope’s mind told her that she ought to mention that other paper which had been given to her at the same time, and this feeling strengthened with the consciousness of her reluctance to do so. Her courage, however, failed her, and she thought it would seem vain to show a poem which was so flattering to herself. But at this moment Mary said—for she had expected another packet, which her father had not sent,

“And this was *all* Victor gave you?”

Hope coloured.

“All that he gave me for you, Mary,” she said.

To Hope’s truthful mind the words seemed an equivocation, and she would probably have overcome her shyness—quite a new feeling towards Mary—and told her friend the simple truth, even if Mary had not helped her to the avowal by saying,

“All for *me*, Hope; did he give you anything for any one else?”

"He gave me something for myself, Mary—a poem, such a pretty poem."

And then, surprised at the amount of interest expressed in her friend's face, she added—

"They all came to tea last night, to wish me good-bye, except your brother Victor, who had an engagement at home; so he gave me *his* good-bye this morning, when he brought Mr. Raymond's letter for you, in such a pretty poem, Mary, all on hope—so cleverly written: was it not kind?"

"I don't know, Hope," said Mary; and the expression of her face puzzled Hope now more than before—it was so very earnest, and even troubled.

"May I see the poem, Hope?"

"I scarcely like to show it to you, Mary," Hope answered, ingenuously remembering various allusions to her golden hair and her lustrous eyes and the peach blossom on her cheek, which, though pleasant enough to read, it was scarcely agreeable to exhibit to the eyes of another.

But Mary's expectant, interested manner rendered it impossible to drop the subject, and she took the letter from her little bag and gave it to her, saying,

"Of course I don't believe the things he says about me. I know one writes all that in poems—to—"

"Make them poetical," said Mary, with a smile which had not very much mirth in it, and which gave place to a very grave look indeed as she took the poem from Hope's little hand, though she must have seen that Hope had no wish to part with it.

She read it carefully, and then, with a cruelty of heart quite foreign to her gentle nature and entirely at variance with the tenderness of tone with which she spoke, she said,

"You will not keep this bit of poetry, my darling; you will give it to me."

"Oh, Mary ! why ?"

"Because it is foolish. Victor ought not to have written it, or given it to you."

"Oh, Mary ! why ?" Hope asked again.

"I can scarcely tell you why, Hope, but he ought not ; and I very much wish you to give it to me, and to let me tell him that you have done so."

"Oh, Mary ! why ?" said Hope for the third time ; and this time she added, "What would your brother think ? It would seem so ungrateful of me ; and besides, why should you take it from me ? You don't suppose it will make me vain, do you ?"

"I don't know, Hope. I don't think it does any one much good to have flattering speeches made to them, but that is not the only reason why I could not bear to let you keep this bit of poetry. Victor and I understand each other very well. He may be vexed with me, but he won't be vexed with you, Hope, or think anything of you except that you are a very dear, good little girl to have shown this flattering poem to me, and to have let me do what I think best with it, trusting me as a friend older and wiser than yourself."

Hope, however, was not disposed to give up the possession of her pretty poem so promptly, and would have persuaded Mary to let her retain it, but her friend was not to be persuaded by her pretty pleading.

"Tell me, Hope," she said ; "if you keep that bit of poetry will you show it to your father, or to your aunt Lucilla ?"

"Oh no," said Hope, quickly, "certainly not to aunt Lucilla."

"And why not ?"

"Because she would be very cross indeed at the very idea of any one's writing such a poem to *me*. She would

call it absurd stuff and tell me to put it in the fire. Aunt Lucilla is always hard on me."

"Well then, Hope, we won't talk about her. But will you show it to your father?"

"Papa would not understand; but yes, Mary, I don't think I should mind showing it to papa, only he would be sure to tell aunt Lucilla, and she would make a fuss."

"Well, then, Hope, would you like to show it to Mademoiselle Mallerie?"

Hope hesitated, and owned she did not think she would.

"And why not? Mademoiselle is never hard, and she never makes a fuss."

"No; but she would say that it was foolish to write such things to a girl of my age, and I think she might be vexed with Mr. Raymond."

"As I am, Hope; though he is my own brother, and I love him dearly. It *is* very foolish of him, and more than foolish, to write such things. And what will you think of me, Hope—will you call *me* hard, if I say that Victor does not mean these pretty things that he writes?"

"Oh, Mary," exclaimed Hope, "that would be to call him untrue."

"A hard word, Hope, certainly. I should be sorry to use it of my brother, and yet——"

"Yet what, Mary?"

"We won't discuss this flattering little poem," said Mary, with a glance at the paper which she still held in her hand, which was not calculated to raise it in Hope's estimation; "but what would you say, Hope, if I were to tell you that it is Victor's way to write in this style to girls to whom he takes a fancy—a very passing fancy perhaps."

Hope coloured; she began to feel rather humbled instead of, as she had been disposed to feel, very much excited.

"What would you say if I told you that Victor had

written many poems—not exactly like this, of course, but in very much the same style—to a great many other girls?”

Whilst Hope was hesitating, doubtful what to answer, several thoughts passed rapidly through Mary's mind. She remembered all Mademoiselle Mallerie had told her of Hope's future prospects. She thought of the temptations and snares that would gather thickly round her, young and inexperienced as she was, in the life that was before her in her own home, and she said,

“Do you know what a flirt is, Hope?”

In spite of the seriousness of Mary's present mood she could not restrain a smile at the suddenness with which Hope replied—

“Yes, of course I do; but oh, Mary, you don't think me a flirt?”

“No, indeed, Hope; I should be very sorry to imagine such a thing, even for a moment, of a dear child like you.”

“Rose is younger than I am, and we all think her a flirt,” replied Hope, in her quick way.

Not for anything at that moment would Mary have given any sign of reproof which might have been a check to Hope's confidence, so she only answered—

“I know what you mean: Rose has a want of reticence and is too forward in her manner. But I was not thinking of her, Hope; I was thinking of my brother.”

“Oh, Mary, you would not call him a flirt!” Hope replied eagerly; “he is so quiet and dignified. You know how particular Mademoiselle is, and I heard her say one day that his manner to ladies was charming, and just as pleasant and kind to Madame, or herself, as to us children, as she calls us.”

“Yes,” said Mary, “his manner is very charming—very fascinating. He has refined tastes; he would never be

otherwise than considerate even to a child. But still, my little Hope, he is a flirt. It is his special weakness. He knows how much it distresses me."

"I heard Mademoiselle say to Rose once that flirting came from vanity, and I also heard her say one day that she never saw any one so free from vanity as your brother Victor. He paints beautifully and sings beautifully, and he never seems the least vain about anything he does."

"And yet he *is* vain, Hope—not of his accomplishments perhaps, or even of his good looks; though I dare say, if we could see into his heart, we should find that he knew well enough what these are worth. But Victor's vanity shows itself in the love of conquest. He likes to bring people—those people at least whom he takes a fancy to for a time—under his influence. That is what pleases *his* vanity, Hope, and sometimes in his efforts to get influence over others he does and says things that are not right, even things that are not quite—quite true, Hope."

"Not quite—quite true!"

Perhaps Hope had not heeded the whole of Mary's speech; perhaps if she had she might have thought some parts of it rather prudish and uncalled for. But the last words startled her into full attention.

"Not quite true, Mary—don't you think your brother true?"

She made the inquiry in such an eager tone that Mary felt impelled to tell her the truth as she believed it in her own heart.

"No, Hope," she said; "at least, Victor's ideas of truth would not satisfy me."

Again she looked at the paper in her hand, and said,

"For instance, Hope, I don't think Victor would mind sending such poems as this to two little maidens, perhaps

on the same day, and letting each of them think that she was the only one to whom he would write it."

Hope made no answer, and at that moment Nannette appeared to say the lady wished to know if Mademoiselle was ready.

"In a moment, Nannette; tell them we are coming," said Mary.

And she put her arm lovingly round Hope.

"We will go, Hope, and what shall we do with this paper?"

"Anything you like," was Hope's reply.

"Then shall we tear it up?" said Mary; "I really do not think it is worth keeping."

And after hesitating a moment, during which Hope made no objection, Mary tore the rhapsody into pieces, and the wind carried them amongst the rose-bushes.


"I am so sorry, Hope, my darling," she said, "that our expected meeting should have been spoiled in this way; you will forgive me, won't you? I think you know how your old friend loves you.

"Sometimes, Hope," she added, as they returned towards the house, and she held her back at the gate for a few last words—"sometimes, Hope, I think I love you a little too much. You have been such a dear companion to me. My whole life has been brightened since you came to Beaumanoir. You know that I would not say or do anything to vex you that I possibly could help."

The tears sprang to Hope's eyes—tears that were not all of affection for Mary.

"Yes," she said, "I know you love me."

"With a very true love, Hope—a love that will *last*, not for a day or a month or a year, but always, even when you are no longer the bright little Hope that you are now. Friendship like ours, built on a true foundation, does not fade with time or trial."



Whether intentionally or not, it seemed to Hope that Mary laid an emphasis on the word "true," and that word fixed itself in her mind.

They had scarcely joined Mrs. Sullivan and Preston in the "salon" when Nannette appeared again, this time with a message from her invalid mistress, begging that her niece would bring her young friend to see her in her room.

CHAPTER XI.


MEANWHILE, Mrs. Sullivan had been turning over in her mind in what way it would be possible to give Miss Raymond a hint concerning her uncomfortable feeling about Hope and the letter ; but when the opportunity seemed given to do so by Mary Raymond's return to the "salon" without Hope, Mrs. Sullivan felt quite unable to avail herself of it.

Around Mary, as around Hope herself, there was, notwithstanding the extreme geniality of their natures, what has been well termed that kind of "gentle hoar-frost" which makes presumption an impossibility. No one would have ventured with either of them on any intrusion into anything they did not desire to reveal, by either word or look of curiosity.

But there was no curiosity concerning Hope in Mrs. Sullivan's mind, only a very true and motherly interest, born of circumstances into sudden strength ; and Mary, being as sympathetic as she was sensitive, realised this.

The minds of these two good women were in affinity at once.

"I hope you will not mind waiting a few minutes more," said Mary. "My aunt is a great admirer of my little friend, though she only knows her from seeing the photographs I have of her, and from the extracts from her letters which I have sometimes read to her. She has long had the greatest



desire to see her, and now I am glad she should have this pleasure."

"I do not think she will be disappointed," said Mrs. Sullivan; "your friend is a very lovely girl, Miss Raymond."

"And as good as she is lovely," replied Mary, warmly.

Mrs. Sullivan made no reply. She could scarcely have been expected to do so, considering that she had seen Hope for the second time in her life only yesterday.

But Mary was sensitive, and, moreover, she caught the expression of the maid's face, and at once remembered what Hope had told her of the disagreeable, prying look which Preston had given her in the railway carriage.

She would scarcely have known, however, what to say, had not Mrs. Sullivan given her the opportunity she desired for saying something by asking if Hope had remembered to give her the letter with which she was entrusted.

Then Mary saw a half-amused, half-scornful smile pass over Preston's disagreeable countenance, and without thinking why she said it, she made—as we so often do when our hearts are single and our motives pure and loving—the most sensible remark that she could possibly have uttered had it been given to her in that moment what to speak—as who shall say it was not?

"She gave me two letters," she said, "or rather two papers—my father's budget and a composition of my brother's, which he brought for her to read. He is quite a poet, Mrs. Sullivan. He won the prize poem this year."

"And your friend, I should think, fully appreciated poetry, judging from her expressive face."

"Yes," said Mary; "I am afraid you will think that I consider her perfect if I say now that she is as clever as she is good."

"She has a warm friend in you," said Mrs. Sullivan, kindly.

"Not warmer than she deserves," Mary replied. "Poor child," she added, "I wish I were going to live nearer her, and that my friendship, such as it is, could be of more use to her."


And then she gave Mrs. Sullivan some further details of Hope's past and present life, which increased that kind woman's interest in her.

"I hope she will come and stay with me sometimes in my home near Wallingford," she said. "I must try to establish a sufficient friendship with her during our journey together to make her willing to do so; but now I think we must be returning to our hotel."

Mary went to fetch Hope, whom she found talking to her old aunt with that sweet forgetfulness of self which was a part of her very nature.

To give pleasure to any one, but especially to give pleasure to those who most need it, to the old or to the sick, was happiness to Hope. She had little knowledge of the poor, but if she had gone amongst them it would have been as a very angel of mercy. She was telling the old lady about her great-nephews and nieces at Francheville, amusing her with little stories of Paul and his clever, funny ways. Mary was struck with the picture which the two presented as she came into the room—the old lady, with shaking head and silver hair, leaning her bent form on an ivory-headed stick, her worn features full of interest as she listened to Hope, who, with sweet up-turned face and the sunshine dancing on her golden head, sat on a low seat beside her. She held Hope's little hand long in hers when she wished her good-bye, and said she hoped God would bless her, and keep her long as bright as now.

Mary, looking at the girl, added another secret prayer of her own, for beneath the outward brightness she saw a weary look on Hope's sweet face and a troubled expres-



sion in her large thoughtful eyes which were unusual to her.

She led her from her aunt's room into her own, to give her there the parting embrace which she would not have cared to give before others; and as she kissed her long and lovingly, Hope's head fell upon her friend's shoulder, and she burst into tears.

"My darling," said Mary, "my little Hope."

"It's nothing," said Hope, raising her head, with a smile shining brightly through the tears like a ray of sunshine in a summer shower. "We've had such a long journey, and I scarcely slept last night."

And putting her arm in Mary's she joined Mrs. Sullivan in the "salon," and shed no more tears.

Mary watched the carriage out of sight, and then, summoning Nannette, told her to go and sit with her mistress until she could come to her, as she had a letter to write.

Yes, she would write to Victor at once, whilst the fulness of her feelings gave courage to her faithfulness.

Frequently as she had heard from home, she had not received any intimation of this friendship that seemed to have sprung up between her brother and her child-friend; and now she reproached herself for not having been on her guard to prevent it, especially when she remembered how much Victor had admired Hope on that only evening when she had seen them together. Since then she had never heard either one of them mention the other. Victor, it is true, was the worst of correspondents, rarely writing at all, and then only in the most hurried style; but Hope's letters were frequent and full of detail, yet she had never mentioned Victor. In all her descriptions of wood and water parties, his name had had no place; and Mary had never imagined otherwise than that, since her departure, Victor had constituted himself his father's chief companion, and had seen

little more of Hope. She was thankful to feel that before she should have returned to Beaumanoir, Victor would have gone to England.


She opened her desk to write ; then, sitting down before the unwritten page, leant her head on her hands, and thought—as she had often thought before—long and sadly of Victor, her only brother, who had been her joy and pride all her life, the idol of her heart, whom she had indeed found, notwithstanding all his many gifts and graces, to be but an “idol of clay.”

How proud Mary had been of those gifts and graces once, and now how thankful she would be if he had never possessed any one of them ; for had not the evil genius of his life, vanity, turned them into a curse to himself and others, instead of their being the blessings which they were intended to be by Him who gave them to him—the Author and Giver of all good gifts.

Mary's letter to her brother would have touched a colder nature than his ; it was so faithful in its reproofs, so earnest in its entreaties that he would not seek only his own pleasure—only the gratification of his own vanity, but would remember the cruel injury he might do to others, whilst thinking only of self.

It did not make Victor angry.

He only smiled and said to himself, “Poor, dear old Mary, she thinks this is another of what she calls my heartless flirtations ; but she is mistaken. And she is mistaken, too, if she thinks that I don't understand her ‘innocent little Hope’ a great deal better than she does. If Mary had only let her alone, and not wormed the poor little thing's secret out of her, why should she not have kept my second little poem quite as happily as she kept my first ? I should not have made it, indeed, quite what it was if Hope had not given me encouragement by showing herself so well-



pleased with my first attempt at verse-making in her honour."

Which first attempt she had never even seen.

On the Sunday previous to Hope's leaving Beaumanoir, they were all to have spent the day, as usual, at Francheville; but as they were leaving the house Elsie tripped on the steps, fell and hurt her foot.

It was but a trifling accident; but Mademoiselle feared a sprain, and she was left at home with Madame.

In the hurry of a fresh start, after it was found that the accident was of no consequence, the English prayer-books were forgotten, and Hope ran back to fetch them.

The three little books, all exactly alike—Mademoiselle's last present to the girls—lay on the hall table, and quickly taking up two of them she hurried after Mademoiselle and Rose, and giving one to the latter carried the other herself into the English chapel.

Their delay in starting had made them late, and a gentleman and lady were in two of the seats which they always occupied.

Some English people with whom they were slightly acquainted opened their pew door with a sign that there was room for one, and Rose, who delighted in any change, however trifling, pushed in front of Hope that she might be the one to avail herself of the offer.

Mademoiselle Mallerie and Hope went into their own pew.

Victor Raymond, who had become of late a regular attendant at the morning service in the English chapel, watched the scene from his seat. He was always later in leaving the church than they were, and to-day he delayed till all the little congregation had left the chapel. Then, as he passed the place where Hope had sat, he took from the desk the little ivory-bound prayer-book that lay upon it—left there in readiness for the evening service—placed

between its leaves a folded paper, reclasped and returned it to its place, without a glance at the monogram on the cover, which might have shown him to whom it belonged.

Meanwhile Rose, not being in her own pew, carried Hope's book with her to the Raymonds', without even perceiving that it was not her own, and left it with her parasol on the hall table, where it lay unobserved all day.

That evening it chanced that Bertrand Raymond was granted the treat of going with the Beaumanoir party to the English service, instead of accompanying his own people to the "oratoire." He carried the books, and when they were in the pew handed them to Hope, who was next to him, and who gave Mademoiselle's to her, appropriated her own to herself, and taking Rose's from the pew desk, where it had lain all day, handed it to her.

No sooner had Rose opened it than she saw that it contained a thin folded paper which had not been there that morning. She dared not draw it from the page in which it was carefully inserted ; but her heart beat with excitement, and not one word did she hear of the service that evening from the beginning to the end : yet—so poorly can even the most careful observers judge of the workings of the heart from the outward appearance—Mademoiselle commended her on their way home from church for her improved seriousness and attention. Rose was usually restless at church, but to-night she had sat very quietly, too busy wondering who could have inserted that mysterious paper in her book, and what its contents could possibly be, to have any thought to bestow on the bonnets or the looks of those around her. She kept the little book carefully in her pocket, for it was not till she was alone in her room at night that she could draw forth the paper.

What was it?

Only a few lines of poetry, very fresh and pretty, addressed

to some one for whom the writer had a very great and respectful admiration. Her monogram was also on a little silver plate on the cover, but monograms are not always very clearly read, and these happened to be particularly illegible. It never came into Rose's foolish little head, however, to imagine that the person who had placed the poetry in the prayer-book had done so imagining it to be the property of another. Of course it was meant for her, and who could have put it there but Victor Raymond. It had lain—or rather she had imagined that it had lain—all day in the dark little passage between the "salon" and the "salle-à-manger," but he must have seen it there.

Poor, foolish Rose! no thought but that of gratified vanity filled her mind. She had no wish to conceal her treasure—indeed it scarcely seemed a treasure at all—so little did she care for the verses themselves, full as they were of pretty ideas very elegantly expressed. What delighted her and made her silly little heart beat so fast, was the fact that she had, for the first time in her life, been made the object of an admiring effusion. She longed to carry the piece of poetry triumphantly into the opposite room, and display it there before the astonished eyes of Hope and Elsie; but, as this was impossible, she locked it up in her writing-desk, and going from thence to her looking-glass, gazed at the reflection of the handsome face which had called forth so just a tribute to its beauty.


And then, thinking but little of the poem addressed, as she fondly imagined, to her, or even of its writer, she combed out her long hair with greater pride than ever, and lay down to rest with her mind full, not of the happiness this one homage to her charms had afforded her, but of all the conquests which these charms would assuredly make when the height of her ambition was reached, and she was introduced into what she was accustomed to call "the world."

CHAPTER XII.

It was a wet evening, and the steadily falling rain helped to depress Hope, as the train drew near London and she collected her various small belongings in readiness for arrival at the terminus where Frank was to meet her.

She had not seen him for nearly two years, and the circumstances under which they had parted had been sad enough for the remembrance of them to throw a gloom over the anticipation of this meeting.

Mrs. Sullivan observed her depression, and sought to cheer her, whilst wondering at its cause. Her endeavours to establish a friendship between herself and her charming young companion had been eminently successful. Hope possessed a singularly responsive nature, and though her natural reserve was not easily overcome, all her shyness had melted, as dew in sunshine, under the influence of Mrs. Sullivan's motherly kindness. She could not have spoken of her lost poem indeed, but ere many miles of their journey had been passed over, she was entering, not with forced but with real interest into every subject of conversation, which Mrs. Sullivan started, first with the object of beguiling Hope's mind from whatever the trouble might have been which had left the trace of tears on her face, and afterwards because she found in her such reciprocity both of intelligence and sympathy that it afforded her the greatest pleasure to talk to her.



But as they neared London, and all sights were shut out from view save the miles and miles of closely-packed miserable houses, on whose roofs the rain was falling heavily with a dreary melancholy noise, Mrs. Sullivan saw that Hope became a less interested listener, and ceased almost entirely to speak.

"There's Frank!" she exclaimed directly the train stopped, for there was little difficulty, even amidst the number of persons standing on the platform, in distinguishing the figure of a young man who towered above them all by several inches.

Frank recognized his sister with almost equal speed. Perhaps, too, there were not many such fair faces as that which he saw turned towards the platform with an eager, questioning look.

He came up to their carriage at once, and taking off his hat to Mrs. Sullivan helped her and Hope to alight.

"Why, Hope," was his first exclamation, "you've grown into a woman since I last saw you."

And then, evidently checked by Mrs. Sullivan's presence from adding anything further, he offered to see after the luggage. But being informed by Mrs. Sullivan that her maid was already doing so, he sent a porter to fetch a cab, and proceeded to deliver various messages from his aunt, thanking Mrs. Sullivan for her kindness, and hoping she would one day give them an opportunity of seeing her at Westbourne.

"It has been no kindness, I assure you, to take charge of your sister," she replied. "I have to thank her for the pleasant companionship which has made my journey so pleasant. I quite hope I may one day come to Westbourne. Meanwhile Hope has promised that she will ask her father's consent to her paying me a little visit at Birchfield."

She held out her hand to Frank, kissed Hope with a

friendliness which a bystander would have imagined to have been of more than three days' growth, and took her place in the cab waiting for her, followed by Preston, who returned Hope's good-bye smile with a very stiff bend of her head.

Then Frank, released from the restraint of a stranger's presence, indulged in a good stare at his sister, and exclaimed—


"I say, Hope, but you *are* a woman, and a precious handsome one too. Talk of letting you go back to school after the holidays—not if I know it, or can prevent it! I tell you what: we'll make the old cat abdicate, and hand over her throne and sceptre to you at once."

Hope's heart, as well as her eyes, had sunk beneath that long fixed stare of Frank's, and at the open opinion of her appearance he had so coarsely expressed.

Now her heart sank lower still, and when Frank added, again surveying her from the crown of her simple travelling hat down to the well-fitting boots on her small feet,

"And dressed too, as you French people say, '*aux quatre épingles*.' Well, the cat was right, for once in her life, when she got my father to send you to France, in spite of all old Pill-box had to say. The old fellow will change his tune when he sees what these French people have made of you. Well, come along and get some refreshment; we've only half an hour before the Westbourne train starts, and it won't do to spend it here on the platform."

Hope felt ready to cry, not so much at what her brother said, for many a schoolboy would have spoken in precisely the same way, but at the manner in which he said it and the look which accompanied his words. She restrained herself, however, and summoned courage to say, with a nervous tremor in her voice—she had always been more afraid of Frank than of anybody else, and he was very little altered—



"Please don't talk like that, Frank; I can't bear to hear you say such things."

"What things?" he asked with a laugh; "can't you bear to be told that you're handsome, and well dressed? If so, you're the first girl I ever saw who couldn't. Why, there's the cat herself—she's fifty if she's a day; but ask her if she *can* bear to be told 'such things.'"

"Do you mean aunt Lucilla?" asked Hope.

"Aunt Lucilla!" he exclaimed. "A fine aunt she is to me! I hope she may be a more agreeable one to you. I never call her anything, my dear, but 'the cat.' That's my name for her—the sly, meddling old thing! She's got the temper of a fiend, though she manages to put on such a smooth outside to strangers. And as for vanity, why she was set up for the evening yesterday, because Pill-box came in to ask when we expected you, and paid her some compliments on her youthful appearance."

"Do you mean Dr. Andrewes?" said Hope.

"No other, my dear; and a very worthy old gentleman he is, though it's noble of me to say it, for I'm no favourite of his, I know. He put me down in his black books some time ago, and I've never been able to get him to take me off. But he's *not* a tom-cat, Hope, though he is a bit of a tom-fool. He's an open, straightforward old chap as ever lived. And, by Jove, Hope, isn't he fond of *you*! Get him to leave you his fortune. He hasn't got chit or child of his own, and they say his money will go to some distant relation he doesn't even know, unless he wills it away to some hospital. Get him to leave it to you, and we'll go shares."

Thus did Frank rattle away while the luncheon he had ordered was being prepared, and Hope made but little reply. Frank began to think that his sister's brains were not equal to her beauty, and to find her rather a dull companion, in spite of his satisfaction at first sight of her; but


the entrance of the waiter with the hot dishes diverted his thoughts into a different channel.

He asked Hope what wine she would take, and ordering some claret for her, desired the waiter to bring him a bottle of sherry.

Hope was very inexperienced in such matters, but it surprised her to see her brother drink off glass after glass, until by the time they had finished their early dinner, or late luncheon, or whatever this three o'clock meal might be considered, the bottle was empty. Her surprise, however, became much greater when, after she had risen from the table, Frank called for brandy. His face was flushed, his eyes bright; Hope fancied that his voice was changed, and a sick feeling which she shrank from putting into words took possession of her. Surely her brother was taking a great deal. She felt disposed to remonstrate, yet dared not, for she remembered how of old Frank would brook no interference; and it was an immense relief to her that just as Frank had finished his first glass and poured out a second, the bell clanged forth its deafening noise, and the porter, who had taken charge of their luggage, informed them that this was the Westbourne train.

Hope tried to persuade herself that it was only a nervous fear which made her fancy that Frank's step was not quite steady as he led the way to the platform. He tripped on the step as he followed her into the carriage, the door of which the porter held open; then flinging himself heavily into the corner opposite to that into which she had shrunk, her one thankful thought being that there was no other occupant of the carriage, he fell almost immediately into a heavy sleep.

Hope's fear had become a certainty. She had seen the expression of the porter's face, as he looked first at Frank and then at her, and the shocking humiliating truth was



burnt into her poor little heart that her brother was not sober. Her cheeks were dyed with shame as she drew down the blinds of the carriage, hoping thus to prevent other passengers from getting in, earnestly trusting that he might not wake, for if he did, and should call for more wine at some of the refreshment rooms, what should she do. She had trusted herself so entirely to Frank's guidance, that she did not know that the train was an express, and that after the stoppage at the first station, only a few miles from London, there would be no other until they reached their destination. Just before they did so Frank roused himself, and slowly awaking to the knowledge of where he was, and with whom, he informed Hope he "had had a famous nap, and he hoped she had also. And this was Westbourne; the carriage would be waiting for them, and the old cat would see that he was to be trusted to bring her safely down."

"She did her best to prevent my coming up for you," he added; "and when I let the governor see I was not going to be controlled by her, she wanted Ben to come up to—to take care of *me*, I suppose, while I took care of you."

"Who is Ben?" asked Hope.

"Oh, he's our charming aunt's charming factotum. You'll see him directly, for he'll be in charge of the ponies. She has her own way with my father about those ponies," he added, making use of some expression which Hope had never heard before, but which she instinctively felt must be an oath.

Hope asked no more questions, and made no more remarks; but became absorbed in looking out of the window as they entered the station, where everything seemed so strangely familiar that it was difficult to realise that nearly a year had passed since she last set her foot on that platform. Even the books in the bookstall seemed the very same that

she had seen there ten months ago, and the same melancholy-looking woman sat in the same chair in the ladies' waiting-room, stitching, as it appeared to Hope, at the very same seam that she had always seen in her fingers ever since she had known her, and probably thinking still the same sad thoughts of the dead husband who had been crushed in an accident on the line, and left her to earn her own living and that of six small children. Hope recognized her with a bright kindly smile, and she too recognized Hope; though perhaps she might not have done so quite as readily had she not caught sight of Frank blustering about the platform in wondering impatience at "the ponies" not being there. The noise he was making had, indeed, been the reason of Hope's preferring to go into the waiting-room rather than keep him company outside, and there she remained until a rough summons from him called her out.

As she left the waiting-room in obedience to his call, with another of those pleasant smiles which lighted up her whole countenance, and kindled a faint responsive brightness even on the wan face of the widow, two ladies, waiting for the next train, remarked to the woman that she seemed to know that lovely young lady, and asked who she was.

The woman replied that she did not know her name, and had not seen her for months. She thought she must have been away at school, but it was not a face to forget.

"No," said the lady, "she's quite lovely. Is that gentleman her brother?"

"That's more than I can tell you," the attendant said. "I've never seen them together before, but I should think he is. She looks too young to be anything nearer than his sister, and I'm sure it's to be hoped for her sake that she isn't; I've seen him come into the station many times so drunk that he could scarcely stand."

The ladies said it was very dreadful, which it was, and

thought no more of the lovely girl and her brother, who meanwhile had taken their seats in the pony-carriage, which was just drawing up to the steps of the station, and which Hope had never seen before.

"They're beauties, aren't they?" asked Frank, as Hope, her spirits rising as she saw how much more steadily her brother now walked and spoke, expressed her admiration of the lovely pair of cream-coloured ponies. "I promised the governor I wouldn't say anything about them, and I've kept my word. You won't mind driving them about Westbourne, will you? and I hope you'll see that the old cat lets you have your rights. They're yours, mind, not hers."

And touching the pretty creatures lightly with his whip, they set off at a quick trot which soon brought them to the new home which Hope had never yet seen.

Her aunt's descriptions had often made her feel glad that it had been only rented, not purchased, and now the first sight of it made her most thankful for this.

A large, newly-built white house, standing in a square garden still newer than itself, without a tree to be seen or a shrub of more than a year's growth, was not a place to realise Hope's ideas of a home. She was but a child still, and had not yet learned how little the architecture of our houses or the scenery which surrounds them have to do with the creating or destroying of those sweet charities and gentle influences which are the true essence of a home.

Experience taught her, as it teaches us all, that sour tempers and unloving souls are to be found in the sunniest abodes, where century-old trees spread their pleasant shade over soft green turf and fair and fragrant flowers; whilst in many an ugly red brick or white-washed house—one of a long row perhaps, or standing in some dull court—are lovely souls, living such happy, holy lives as are a daily joy both to men and angels, or adding their names, even whilst yet on earth,

to the noble army of martyrs, by the sweet patience with which they suffer in un murmuring silence the sorest sorrows. Later in life Hope made acquaintance with many a pure unworldly soul, delighting in the works of nature and the God who created them, in the garrets of the dingy town; whilst in some of nature's loveliest spots, surrounded by all that is sweetest in sight and sound, she saw worldly, selfish men and women, utterly unmindful of the God who made them, and careful only for greed and gain.

But at present Hope was a worshipper of the picturesque, and a place like Marylands was hateful to her.

She had not much time, however, to realise this before the front door opened, and her aunt Lucilla came out to meet her. Hope looked around as if half expecting to see her father, but he was not there, and, when her aunt led the way into the library where he awaited her, she was a good deal shocked at the change in his appearance. His hair had been grey a year ago—it was white now, and his form was so bent, and his face so thin and pale, that, though only a man of fifty, he might have been taken for seventy.

CHAPTER XIII.

"PAPA seems quite an invalid," Hope said to her aunt, when they met in the drawing-room before dinner. "Has he been ill long? No one told me anything about it."

"He has not been ill at all," Miss Lucilla replied. "Dr. Andrewes says that it is only a failing of strength. He has never been strong, you know."

"I seem to know very little about him," said Hope. "I was only one year with him before I went to France; he certainly was not like this then. I don't ever remember thinking him ill."

"He was so taken up with your mother's illness at that time," replied Miss Lucilla; "her death was a great shock to him, no doubt."

"And he has missed her very much," said Hope, uttering her own thoughts aloud rather than addressing herself to Miss Lucilla. "I wish he had not sent me to school; I ought to have stayed with him."

Miss Lucilla drew herself up. Her niece's remarks seemed to imply reproach to her.

"I assure you, Hope," she said, "your father has been in no want of company with me here, and I scarcely think that a girl of your age could take the care of him that I have done, or be an equally congenial companion."

"I did not mean that, aunt Lucilla," said Hope. "I only meant that I was shocked to see him look so ill. I am his

only daughter, and I feel as if I ought not to have gone away."

"Then you are very much mistaken in your feelings, Hope," replied her aunt, "as young people are apt to be when they think themselves wiser than their elders. How were you to be educated, I should like to know, if you had remained here? I am sure," she added, "it has been the greatest advantage to you to have been away all these months when we have been moving into this new house, and there has been so much to settle. A nice interruption it would have been to study."

Hope's reply was again unfortunate. She was too honest by nature to have much tact, except where the intensity of her sympathy led her to enter fully into the feelings of another and made her shrink from wounding them, and she had never had any sympathy with her aunt Lucilla.


"I could have helped in all there was to do," she said, "and I could have been with papa."

"I never need help," said aunt Lucilla, "and I took care that your father was never lonely."

She felt disposed to say that she was afraid Hope had not lost either her independence of character or her good opinion of herself, but she refrained from administering a reproof on the first day of her niece's return.

And it was well that she did, for Hope was in a very over-wrought condition, and one more drop in the full cup might have caused an overflow, which would have led Miss Lucilla to the conclusion that if Hope had not parted with her independence and self-conceit, neither had she learnt to overcome her temper—these being the special faults with which Miss Lucilla had always credited her niece.

And yet, full of faults as Hope felt herself to be, she was neither independent, nor conceited, nor ill-tempered. On the contrary, hers was a clinging nature, always looking for



some wisdom beyond her own to guide her ; some strength superior to her own on which to lean ; some one infinitely higher, better, purer than herself, whom she could love and venerate with that hero-worship which has such an attraction for all ardent young natures.

This ideal Hope had never yet found. Victor Raymond had come very near to it, but just as Hope was raising the shrine within her heart, imagining that she had found an idol worthy of being placed on it, Mary's hand had been stretched forward to remove it and stamp her idol with defects.

A bell at this opportune moment interrupted the conversation, and Miss Lucilla led the way into the dining-room.

" Ben always settles your father comfortably in his seat before we come in," she said, " and I never wait for Frank ; he has no idea of punctuality—indeed he has no idea of anything that he ought to have. If your father has been less well and strong than usual of late, he has only your brother to thank for it."

And with this cheering remark still ringing in her ears Hope took her place at the table, her father sitting opposite to her in the high easy-chair in which Ben had established him. Perhaps she was disappointed at the small amount of notice he took of her after her ten months' absence ; but he took little notice of anything, not even raising his eyes when Frank came in after they had been some time at dinner, and sitting down, without an apology to any one, called for soup, which was immediately brought to him.

Hope could not help glancing at her aunt, remembering the exceeding strictness from which she had suffered so much in time past, when she would not have been allowed to have any dinner had she ventured to come into the room after the door was closed. But Miss Lucilla took no notice

either, and the dinner dragged on its dreary course, until at length, to Hope's infinite relief, it came to an end.

Mr. Savile had sat perfectly impassive throughout, never speaking except when spoken to, and seeming to take no interest in anything, though Hope fancied that she saw the faint colour mount to his pale cheek and perceived a slight nervous tremor of the head when Frank called again and again for wine.

When they rose from the table Ben assisted his master into the drawing-room, and Miss Lucilla signed to Hope to follow, whilst she herself remained behind, as Hope observed, to lock up the wine.

Frank had left the dining-room with his father and Hope, but instead of following them into the drawing-room he went out of the house, slamming the front door after him.

"Where is Frank?" was Hope's third unfortunate remark to her aunt Lucilla on that first day of her return.

"Where, indeed?" replied her aunt, with a scornful curl of her lip, and Hope heard some muttered words about "not allowing any one to get drunk here at all events."

Low as Miss Lucilla spoke, Hope felt sure that her father had heard also, or at least had caught her meaning, for again a faint colour spread itself over his white face.

But he said nothing. The very spirit of silence seemed to have taken possession of him. He did not ask a question about Hope's journey, or make an inquiry about her life at Beaumanoir or the friends she had left there. Hope might have imagined that he had grown deaf during her absence, had she not felt so sure that he had heard Frank's repeated calls for wine at dinner, and also Miss Lucilla's muttered remarks afterwards. She said to herself that her father had always been a very silent man, recalling the time when her mother would rally him playfully on his silence, telling him that it was a good thing that she and Hope were fond of

talking, and forced him into conversation, or he might lose the use of his tongue from want of exercising it. But she recognized that his present silence, so impassive and uninterested, was very different from that past silence which he had been always so ready to break at the first appeal from wife or child. Miss Lucilla talked very little. The Saviles were a silent family, and Hope found it difficult to keep up any conversation on that first evening at home—such a contrast as it was to the pleasant evenings at Beaumanoir.

It was quite a relief when the clock struck ten, and Ben appeared with the bedroom candlesticks, and waited to assist his master upstairs.

“You know your room?” asked aunt Lucilla.

“I think I do,” replied Hope—rooms were easily remembered where the plan of the house was so straight and square; “it is the first door on the left on the second flight.”

Miss Lucilla answered “Yes,” and added that she “should see the house to-morrow morning.”

Then wishing her good-night she informed her, with a return of the sneer on her face which seemed to accompany every mention of Frank’s name, that “if she heard sounds in the house she need not be alarmed—it would be only Ben letting her brother in;” and she also repeated her offer of a maid to help her, which Hope again declined. Her one longing was to be alone, and to be able to collect her thoughts, after this fatiguing and most painful day; yet was there very little connection in the confused ideas that chased one another through her troubled head, save that through them all ran a chain of bitter disappointment and shame.

This then was home! where no one seemed glad to see her, or to care for her improvement in appearance or manner or studies, or anything, except Frank, whose coarsely

expressed admiration was yet more painful than the impassiveness of her father and the cold-hearted indifference of her aunt.

The thought of Frank held her longer than any other had had power to do. She wondered where he was, if he would come home that evening; then hiding her face in her hands, the first tears she had shed that day forced themselves through her delicate fingers—tears of bitter misery and shame at the thought of her brother drinking himself into a state of degradation.


"Oh, mother, mother!" she cried aloud, and at the word she gave thanks to God that she too was not a sharer in this shame and sorrow; and yet it was so hard—so hard to bear it all alone.

That night Hope could not "say her prayers." She tried again and again, but no words would come, only tears—such tears as she had never shed before, not even when they carried her dead mother from her sight. Then, not recognizing that those tears were prayers in the sight of Him who was gathering them into His bottle, there to be mingled by His blessing with the grace that was to change them into the sanctifying influence, by means of which her soul was to be strengthened, she said to herself that she was too worn-out to pray that night, undressed hurriedly, and, almost before her head was on the pillow, fell into a heavy sleep, from which she started up in fright a few hours later.

At the first instant she could not recall her thoughts sufficiently to know where she was. Then everything returned to her mind, and sitting up in bed she listened to the sounds in the house that had awoke her—voices and footsteps.

It was Frank returning home, and Ben helping to get him to bed, and to see that he did not set the house on fire.

She listened for a minute or two more, recognized Ben's



voice speaking in a tone of mingled remonstrance and command, heard some incoherent mutterings in reply which turned her very heart sick, and then, throwing herself passionately down on the pillow, she drew the clothes over her head to shut out all possibility of hearing anything further, and slept no more that night.

Oh, why had no one told her of the grief and shame that she would find awaiting her at home ! It was cruel not to have done so.

This fresh trouble had come upon her very unexpectedly, and we cannot wonder if, brave-hearted as she was by nature and singularly buoyant as well, she rose next morning, after her few hours of sleep, feeling miserably weary and depressed.

All looked to her very dreary and wretched, for the many comforts which surrounded her were not of a nature to be very highly appreciated by her. It was nothing to her to have so many servants ready to wait on her. She preferred waiting on herself ; and as for the costly furniture around her, she did not even admire it.

According to promise, her aunt Lucilla took her next day all over the new house, which she had been careful to furnish completely in Hope's absence, that she might arrange everything after her own ideas and in accordance with her own taste. These ideas were utterly at variance with Hope's, and no two people could have possessed more totally dissimilar tastes.

So that as Miss Lucilla led Hope from room to room, she herself was as much hurt at the small amount of admiration her niece expressed, as Hope had been last night at the lack of interest shown in her return home. The holland coverings had been removed from the drawing-room furniture in honour of Hope's return, Miss Lucilla herself superintending the work in her desire that nothing

should be injured, and she had looked for the reward of her trouble in the admiration that her niece would display.

But Hope could not feign an admiration which she did not feel.

The quaint old "salon" at Beaumanoir, with the round turrets opening into it and the deep mullioned windows, in one of which stood the carved oak writing-table with its antique silver inkstand, which was Mademoiselle's special place, and in the other the low octagon tapestry-covered table, where they all used to gather of an evening with their work-boxes and baskets, with Madame's high-backed chair placed at a little distance, and beside it a tiny table for her knitting and spectacles, and before it an old-fashioned footstool—these things, in Hope's eyes, were all far prettier, far pleasanter to see than the walnut cabinets, embossed with gold (containing, certainly, very lovely things, chiefly treasures her father had brought from India, but all imprisoned behind glass under lock and key), and the heavy tables adorned with books of engravings stiffly arranged at certain distances. The ornaments were handsome and the books interesting, and if Hope could only have broken up the whole arrangement of them, and scattered them here and there in places where they could be used instead of looked at, she would have admired and appreciated them; and square as the room was, she thought it might be made habitable by forming a nook here and a corner there, and turning it into a liveable room; but in its present condition it was, to her eyes, hopelessly dreary, and very ugly, in spite of its carved chairs with their velvet coverings, its handsome chandelier, its mirrors and chiffoniers and countless ornaments.

Everything, however, was exactly after the heart of Miss Lucilla Savile, who at length found herself mistress of what she considered a handsome house, and at the head of an

establishment such as she had coveted all her life. That the house belonged to her brother, and that the establishment was kept up at his expense, in no way took from her enjoyment. She shone with a reflected honour, certainly, but as Mr. Savile's sister the reflection was strong enough to satisfy her. When Hope returned from school to take up her own position in her own home things might be different, but this was in the future, and she need not trouble herself about it now. Hope must go back to France for another year at least; and even when she did come home "for good," Miss Lucilla questioned whether she might not be glad to retain her aunt's services as a housekeeper. The charge of such an establishment as Miss Lucilla's influence over her brother had succeeded in setting up at Marylands, would be a heavier burden for Hope's young shoulders than she perhaps might like to carry.

So Miss Lucilla made herself comfortable in her brother's house, was driven here and there amongst her friends, received tea-parties and whist-parties in the stiff drawing-room, and went to them at other people's houses, leaving her brother to doze away the evening under the care of Ben, except when Dr. Theophilus Andrewes came to see him and roused him into more energy than any one else had it in their power to do.

This, however, happened but rarely now. Marylands was more than a mile out of Westbourne, and the doctor had a very large practice and was growing old, and generally returned from his rounds much too tired to care to go out again after dinner. Moreover, Mrs. Andrewes was in very delicate health, and he did not like to leave her alone.

Of late, however, Miss Lucilla had not gone to any whist-parties, or received friends at home. It was not possible to do so whilst Frank was at Marylands. His father was powerless to control him. Unless she were there to exercise

her authority he would go on calling for wine until he was carried unconscious to bed, or fell asleep on the dining-room sofa until he was able to rouse himself sufficiently to stagger to his room.

This had happened once or twice on his first returning home, and Miss Lucilla was resolved it should happen no more, so she made Hope's stay at Westbourne an excuse for declining all invitations for the present. It would never do, she said, to bring a girl like Hope forward. It was only very unfortunate that she should have grown so tall and look so much older than she really was. But she must make it her duty to keep her in the back-ground as much as possible, and certainly she should be kept at school for at least another year. Her fear was lest Dr. Andrewes should take a different view from her on this matter. He was the only person whose influence over her brother might, if strongly exercised, lead him to form a decided wish and adhere to it. He had not been able to thwart her wish with regard to her niece's going to France, but he *had* succeeded in doing so as regarded her nephew's returning home for his "long leave." He had got into trouble in his regiment through the sad habits which had been growing upon him so terribly of late; and his commanding officer had himself written to his father, whom he had known personally in India many years ago, telling him kindly that Frank had received now many warnings, but that unless there was a decided reform in his conduct he could not hold out hopes of his being long allowed to remain in the regiment, to which of late he was becoming a disgrace.

This letter had seemed to crush poor Mr. Savile. For months after his wife's death, and especially after Hope's departure for the Continent, he had been in a state of depression of spirits almost amounting to melancholy mania,

often sitting for hours together with his face buried in his hands without uttering a word, and then giving way to fits of weeping like a child.

There had been some talk of sending for Hope, but unless they decided to do so, Dr. Andrewes and Miss Lucilla for once agreed in thinking it better to say nothing to her of her father's condition; and before they had made up their minds what to do he began to improve.

Perhaps the change of house, and the absence of the associations with the scenes of his wife's illness and death, had led to the improvement, but he had certainly brightened greatly after they came to Marylands; and of late weeks he had wonderfully rallied, probably in the anticipation of Hope's return, until this letter from the colonel of Frank's regiment came to break him down utterly. Miss Lucilla found him one day, on her return from the "Beacon"—the gay promenade where it was her delight to spend the afternoon—sitting with it between his hands, his head bent on his chest, his face the picture of woe, but speechless and tearless. She imagined him to be paralysed, and in great alarm sent for Dr. Andrewes, who set her fears at rest on this score, since there was no loss of power either of movement or sensibility. It was only, he said, the result of a shock to an already singularly enfeebled nervous system, but he considered him in a very critical state.

A letter came from Frank himself next day, which Miss Lucilla opened. It contained no allusion to any warnings or exhortations which he had received, but merely mentioned in his usual off-hand style that his leave would begin much earlier than he had expected, to suit the convenience of a brother officer, and that he should "put in an appearance at Marylands" early in the following week. Miss Lucilla wished at once to write forbidding him the house, but Dr. Andrewes thought differently. He even

considered that his arrival might be the means of rousing his father.

"Let him come," he said; "he was always the apple of his father's eye, far more than that bewitching little daughter of his. It always passed my comprehension to think how it could be so, but it was, and perhaps Mr. Savile may rouse at the sight of him. Besides, it's just as well he should see the havoc he has made of his father's health by his conduct; it may teach him a lesson."

Miss Lucilla smiled scornfully. "It will take more than that to teach *him* a lesson," she said: "he will never care for any results of his conduct that do not touch himself. He knows that his expulsion from school, and his rustication from college, contributed to his mother's illness—if, indeed, they were not the cause of it, for I told him so myself, and much good it did him to know it. He ought to be forbidden the house."

Since they could not agree, the matter was referred to the invalid himself. Dr. Andrewes declared he would put the question to him then and there. Going straight to his room—without waiting to hear the objections which Miss Lucilla had to make to such a step, since he considered that he himself, as his medical man, knew much better than she did what was likely to be its effect—he said quietly,

"You've had poor news of Frank, I am sorry to hear; and I'm told he wants to come home next week on long leave. Would you like to see him?"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Savile replied, "let him come."

"Perhaps it will be an anxiety to you to have him here," continued the doctor, ignoring the presence of Miss Lucilla, who had followed him into the room, and was standing out of sight of Mr. Savile, looking greatly offended at the warning finger which the doctor had held up to her to enforce silence. "We must hope he means to reform, but we can't expect

him to be very steady all at once ; he may cause you some anxiety."

"Let him come," said Mr. Savile ; "I shall only be more anxious about him if he does not. Besides, Hope will be here, will she not ?"

"Yes, of course she will," replied the doctor. "Don't you remember telling me the other day that you had found such a nice escort for her, and she would be coming in less than a fortnight ?"

"Did I ?" said Mr. Savile. "No, I don't remember. It is strange how bad my memory is ; I can scarcely recollect anything now. I think it's this constant pain in my head that destroys my memory, and the bad nights I get. You don't know how little I sleep, or how weak I feel—so weak I cannot help crying from weakness, and so dreadfully irritable and miserable."

"Oh yes, I do," said the doctor ; "I know all about it, and mean to get rid of these troubles for you, if I can. But you must help me instead of hindering me. I hear you wouldn't let Ben take you out in your chair yesterday, though it was such a lovely day. This won't do, you know. It's no use my coming to see you unless you obey my orders. Now you're going to have your lunch and be dressed, and then you're to go round the garden till you begin to feel tired and sleepy, and then you may come in and rest in your arm-chair."

And Dr. Andrewes felt his pulse and rose to go, turning back, however, to say,

"Then we are to tell Frank you will be glad to see him ; and we must hope it will make a steady man of him to see how much you need to be cared for."

"Yes, yes ; and Hope will be here, you say ?"

"Yes," replied the doctor ; "not, perhaps, when he arrives, but very soon after. Of course Hope will be here."

"And she will keep him straight; she is sure to have good influence over him. His mother always had: it was wonderful what she could do with him. He forgot when he was away, and he was so much away from her, poor boy; but when he was with her he was a different fellow—and Hope is very like her mother, isn't she, doctor?"


"The very image," said the doctor, with a glance round at Miss Lucilla, which seemed meant to call attention to the fact, that although the invalid spoke in the tone of a child, neither his memory nor his judgment had altogether failed him.

As he left the room he beckoned her to follow him downstairs again.

"Now," he said, "take care not to let him give way. This idea of his little daughter's doing her brother good has roused him. It has given him just what I wanted—hope."

"Excuse me, doctor," said Miss Savile, "if I say that I think it's an absurd idea. You can know nothing of either Frank or Hope if you think that that child will have the least influence over her brother. I must speak plainly, for it's my belief if you let Frank come back here at this moment, to turn the house upside down with his rollicking, riotous ways, you'll be doing your best to kill his poor father."

"Excuse *me*, ma'am," replied the doctor, with his usual good temper, "if I differ from your opinion. You can see for yourself that though Frank may possibly make his father better—mind, I don't say he *will*, but he *may*—he can scarcely make him worse. As for turning the house upside down, I am sure, madam, *you* can be trusted to prevent such a thing as that becoming possible. I pay only a just respect to your powers of administration and command, when I say that I cannot imagine the possibility of any house being turned upside down with you at the head of it. And as for Hope, well, I shall be very much surprised if the



little woman does not work wonders both for Frank and her father ; unless, indeed, the French people have made a very different creature of her from what she used to be—which may God forbid ! ”

And taking off his hat to Miss Lucilla, he was down the steps and in his carriage before she had time to make any further reply.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE conversation between Miss Lucilla and Dr. Andrewes on the subject of Frank's return had taken place three weeks ago, and at this moment Dr. Andrewes was beginning to doubt whether, after all, Miss Lucilla had not been right and he wrong. Generous-minded though he was, he had not as yet made any confession of these doubts to Miss Lucilla; but as day by day he marked Frank's selfish conduct, and saw how utterly callous he was in his indifference to his father's health or happiness, and how the only check to his habits of self-indulgence and dissipation was that which was imposed upon them by his aunt's stern control, he began to think that he had not been wise in his advice, and it would have been better not to have let him come home.

Still, there was the hope that his sister's return might be of some use, both to him and their father; but what troubled Dr. Andrewes mostly was, that since Frank had been at home, behaving as badly as he could behave under the circumstances of restraint around him, Mr. Savile seemed to have lost all pleasure or even interest in the anticipation of Hope's coming. One idea only possessed him, and to that one idea he had awoke, feebly certainly, but quite as strongly as a man in his weak state of nerve could be expected to do, and this was the idea of Frank's degraded condition and the sorrow and shame it brought with it. But he never now spoke of entertaining any ex-

pectation of his reform ; indeed he had scarcely spoken at all during the last few days, and Dr. Andrewes hesitated in buoying him up with fresh hopes, fearing the reaction of a possible disappointment. Yet in his secret heart he longed for little Hope to come, and had he been a religious man he would have prayed that her coming might work all the good he desired.

It was long since Mrs. Andrewes had seen her husband as excited about anything as he was about Hope's return home. If it had not been that his wife was exceptionally weak on the evening of her arrival—Mrs. Andrewes was five years older than the doctor, and had been failing very much of late—he would have ordered the brougham and gone up to Marylands after dinner.

As it was, he waited until the next morning, but not very patiently. His good old coachman, who had driven him night and day for thirty years, and knew every tone in his master's voice and every look on his face, said to his wife when he came in to dinner, after receiving an order "to bring round the carriage again as soon as he could"—

"The doctor's got some bad case on his mind I know. It's easy enough to see when he's thinking of something further than the thing before him. He was out of one house this morning and into another before one knew where he was, and not a minute longer in any than I should think could have given him time to feel their pulse and be off again. So get dinner sharp, and I won't stop a moment longer than is just needful to eat it before I am back with the horses, for he has ordered the carriage and pair this afternoon."

And before half an hour had passed, Bartlett brought the carriage round again.

"To Marylands," said the doctor, stepping into it the moment it stopped.


"The old gentleman up there must be taken worse," said John to himself.

He always called Mr. Savile the old gentleman, though he was at least fifteen years his junior. But he was accustomed to see him walking up and down the gravel walk leaning on Ben's arm, or being drawn round the garden in his wheel-chair; whereas he himself was almost as hale and hearty at seventy as he had been at fifty, in spite of being called out of his bed on an average twice every week, and being out in rain, snow, hail and wind, whenever his duty required him to face the weather.

But scarcely had Bartlett turned his horses into the sweep of gravel that led through the newly-planted shrubs—so small still that they served to conceal nothing whatever from view—up to the large square house, than, to his great surprise, the door was opened, and out upon the steps appeared the daintiest of little figures, dressed in the daintiest of fashions. To Bartlett's eyes she looked like a fairy, she was so unlike anything his eyes were used to look upon at Westbourne; such a complete contrast to the young ladies whom he saw daily, sweeping in and out of the Westbourne shops or parading on the Beacon, with their frills and furbelows, their feathers and flowers, stiff and stately, and self-conscious.

The report which Bartlett gave to his wife Deborah of the impression made upon him by the first sight of Hope, was that he "was struck all of a heap."

"I came to know afterwards," he said, "as it was the very same little lady that master was so fond of taking out in the carriage with him—not so very long ago neither. Many's the time I've had the check-string pulled at the pastry-cook's door for doctor to take her in and give her ices. But lor, it never so much as crossed my mind as it was Miss Hope, the little thing that used to jump out of



the carriage all three steps at a time, with her curls, that shone just like guinea-gold in the sun, tumbling all over her pretty face, and her petticoats up to her knees. You never saw any one so changed in all your life, Deborah."

This was Bartlett's opinion. But it was not Dr. Andrewes'. For the first moment, certainly, he did not recognise Hope, but the next instant she had run down the steps, and he had scarcely got out of the carriage before both her little hands were extended to greet him, and her sweet face held up for the kiss which he might have hesitated to give, had it not been so speedily solicited. Then, still holding his hand, she led him into the house, where they found themselves alone in the large statue-adorned hall, for she had anticipated the ringing of the door-bell.

"So you recognized your old friend's carriage, did you?" said the doctor, his eyes riveted to her sweet face with a long look which was quite as interested and admiring as Frank's had been, though how different in character! "You knew your old friends Rhubarb and Magnesia, when you saw them turning their heads into the sweep, did you?"

Hope laughed her own soft musical laugh, clear as a silver bell, with such a ring of real merriment in it. It went now, as of old it used to go, to the doctor's heart.

"You must not call them by those horrid names," she said.

"Very suitable names for a doctor's beasts," he answered. "You know I always told you so."

"And I always said I would not have them called by such horrid names—the dear, beautiful creatures that have taken me for so many pleasant drives."

"And will take you for so many more, I hope," said the doctor. "You were glad to see them again, were you?"

"Glad?" exclaimed Hope; "indeed I was glad. Aun'

Lucilla said you were coming this afternoon, and I have been watching for you ever since lunch."

"Good little Hope," said the doctor, "to give your old friend such a warm welcome. I was afraid you'd forget all about us with those French people. Well, I didn't keep you long waiting, did I? It's scarcely two o'clock. I thought I should find you still at luncheon."

"Aunt Lucilla has gone out to luncheon," said Hope, "and papa is not yet dressed; he seems so very weak to-day."

Then fixing her large questioning eyes full on the doctor's kind face, she asked,

"Oh, Dr. Andrewes, how *is* papa?"

"You've just said how he is, Hope—very weak;" and he led the way into the library.

"Yes," said Hope, "I see he's very weak. It makes me miserable to find him so changed. Will he get better—will he ever get well?"

"Your father will never be strong, my child," said the doctor; "but he's better now than he was a month ago, and I hope to see him a great deal better still in another month or two. We look to your return, Hope, to do great things for him. His recovery depends so much on——"

He hesitated an instant, and Hope asked eagerly, "On what?"

"Well, chiefly on his state of mind. His illness is more mental than physical, Hope; at least, it is caused more by the mind than the body. He ought to have nothing whatever to try him, and he has had a good deal. Your dear mother's long illness and her loss, and——"

Again he hesitated. Hope could not summon courage to ask now "And what?" for she knew too well.

The colour mounted all over her face and throat. The doctor saw it, and feeling that it would be better for him to

break through the ice immediately, and lose no time in winning the confidence on this point which sooner or later must exist between them, he said,

"And Frank, poor Frank—this trouble is a very heavy one, Hope. You must help me to strengthen your father to bear it."

The truest fatherliness must have been at the core of Dr. Andrewes' heart although it had never been given him to love a child of his own, or he could never have spoken in such a tone of deep fatherly compassion, or worn such a look of real fatherly sympathy on his honest face. His words sent a thrill through Hope's heart, which was not a thrill of sorrow and shame, such as had been produced by every previous remark made either by Frank himself or about him. This good man felt for her. Her shame and grief were a real trouble to him. He would help her to bear them.

Tears, which were not all tears of sorrow, filled her eyes.

"Poor child," said the doctor, drawing his hand across his own; "it's a sad return for you, Hope, but you'll bear it like the brave little woman that I know you of old to be. Now I'll go upstairs and see your father."

He was gone only a few minutes.

"I find him better already," he said, as he returned to the library and found Hope still standing where he had left her, looking out into the square garden at the back of the house, where the flowers were all as newly planted as were the shrubs in the front. "He's going to get up now and go out for a drive in his chair. There's no medicine for him like fresh air, you must remember that, Hope. Fresh air will do him more good than all my boxes and bottles can ever do. It's a lovely afternoon, and I've told Ben to keep him out two good hours. Meantime I'm going to carry you back with me to Westbourne to see Mrs. Andrewes; that's to say, if you'll come."

"Oh, I shall like it so much!" said Hope.

"Then run away and get your bonnet, or your hat, or whatever it is. You must put something on, I suppose?"

"Of course I must," said Hope, with another of the rippling laughs, and she tripped lightly out of the room and up the stairs, the old doctor watching her as she went.


Her step had been a light one always, but accustomed as it had been of late to the highly-polished oak flooring of an old French mansion, it had acquired such a lightness that it seemed to the doctor as though her little feet scarcely touched the ground.

"Well!" he said to himself, "If ever there was a bit of bewitchingness, that child is one. Oh dear, dear, dear!—if only she had a mother; and what in the world is to become of her in this house without one?"


But before he had time to carry this question further the subject of it returned to him, tripping down the stairs yet more quickly, and in another minute she was sitting by his side, having first astonished both Bartlett and the footman (but especially the latter, who was a new comer) very much by kissing both the horses, and then shaking hands warmly with Bartlett, raising her slight figure on the tips of her tiny feet to do so, and stretching out her little hand to reach him, as he looked down from his coach-box in admiring delight at the warm reception which this fairy-like young lady was giving to her old favourites, Rhubarb and Magnesia.

This also was related for Deborah's benefit.

"If you could but have seen her," he declared. "Why, there's James, he has got about as few brains as ever a mortal man was blessed with. I tell you often, Deborah, what a dull companion I find him; never an idea of his own to put forward as he sits by me, hour after hour, without seeming to take notice of nothing. But even James was



struck with *her*. 'Why, Mr. Bartlett,' he said to me, when he'd put her into the carriage and got up alongside me, 'who is she; we don't see such young ladies as that about here, do we?' 'No,' said I, 'we don't. She's come from France.' 'Oh, she's a French lady, is she?' says he, quite interested for once in his life. 'Not a bit of it,' says I; 'don't you go to take such a stupid idea as that in your head. She's English all over; the daughter of that old gentleman doctor's been attending so long at that house.' For you see, Deborah," he added, with a tone of patriotism in his voice, "I wasn't a going to let the French folk get the credit of such a beautiful creature as she is—not even with James. Though, between you and me, Deborah, I think them boots and gloves that she'd got on *must* be French. I saw the boots when she was a-standing at the top of the steps waiting for me to bring my horses up; and when she put out her hand to me, why, I did not think it had got any glove on till I touched it. Such boots and gloves seem to have grown on the hands and feet. Oh, but she *is* a dainty morsel! Wait till you see her, Deborah. And isn't the master fond of her. He always was, you know, and mistress too. It's my opinion now that there wasn't anything whatsoever on his mind this morning more than the impatience he was in to get his work over, and have a clear afternoon to go up to Marylands and bring her back to see the mistress. She's there now, and I've had orders to bring the carriage round at five o'clock to take her back."



CHAPTER XV.

HALF the good doctor's fears about Hope had been dispelled before they got back to the old house in Westbourne.

Mercury was an essential part of Hope's nature. She sank, indeed, at times beneath the waves, and very cold they felt to one so sensitive to pain and fear; but the buoyancy of her temperament brought her quickly to the surface again, and the sunshine and freedom felt all the more exhilarating after the chill and the dread.

Hope found a ready listener in Doctor Andrewes, and the tide of her sweet, childlike talk rippled on unceasingly during their two miles' drive, as she told him detail after detail of her life abroad.

The good doctor felt a different man with little Hope Savile seated once more beside him in the comfortable carriage, which was so well hung on its easy springs, and so steadily drawn by his white and bay horses, that its motion was no disturbance to the flow of conversation.

Hope was a fluent talker, but her ideas were so fresh, her descriptions so vivid, her manner so artless, and her voice so peculiarly musical, that no one—unless, indeed, it were her aunt Lucilla—would have been likely to complain of her talking too much. The doctor certainly did not tire of her tellings, for no sooner were they settled in the cosy drawing-room, where Mrs. Andrewes was awaiting Hope's arrival, almost as anxious, if not quite as eager, as the doctor

himself had been to see her once more, than he made her tell most of it all over again for his wife's benefit.

A cosy room indeed was that old-fashioned drawing-room in Highboro' Street.

Hope had always liked it better, and felt more at ease there than in any other place in Westbourne ; and when the doctor, scarcely giving her time to receive Mrs. Andrewes' warm embrace, took her by her two little hands, and sat her down in the low chair, placed ready for her beside the old lady's arm-chair, a home-like feeling came over her for the first time since her return.

People still said, as they had been saying for the last twenty years, that it was perfectly absurd for Dr. Andrewes, the first medical man in either the place or neighbourhood, to go on living in that end of the town, with miles of streets and villas between himself and all his "best patients."

But the house was his own, and he loved it. He had made a real true home of it when only the streets existed, and before the villas had begun to spring up one after another, stretching far away all in the opposite direction. If his "best patients" found it too far to send for him, then they might send for some one nearer. It would be rather a relief to him than otherwise, for he had more on his hands than he could well attend to ; his income was far larger than his requirements ; he had no one to provide for, and he could afford to be independent.

So he lived on in the old Priory-house, as it was called, in which Hope had ever greatly delighted, and which seemed to her more delightful than ever to-day from the contrast it presented to the high square rooms at Marylands, and the sort of resemblance to the quaint old house at Beaumanoir, —not that there was much real similarity, save that the sitting-rooms at the Priory-house were like those at Beaumanoir, very low and panelled, and abounded in doors,

which yet did not let in any draughts, being only doors leading into inner rooms. Here too, as there, the furniture was arranged for comfort and not for show; and though in Highboro' Street no one thought of looking out of window, where the only view was of the lawyer's house opposite, one scarcely missed the charm of trees and flowers without with so much to compensate within.

The room abounded in flowers; there were stands in every window, with such fuchsias and geraniums as Hope often declared no one but Mrs. Andrewes could grow. The old lady called them her children, and the doctor knew no better way of bringing to her face the cheery smile he loved to see there than by bringing home to her an addition to her already large family.

Hope had not been many minutes in the low chair where the doctor had planted her, before she was up again, roaming over the room, recognizing old friends in books and pictures and flowers, and making acquaintance with new ones.

Mrs. Andrewes sat and watched her. The doctor sat and watched them both, the same old wish returning to his mind that it had but pleased God to give them just one such child as Hope was, to be the joy and crown of their married life, which, save for this one absent happiness of child-love, had been so perfect. There were not many people in Westbourne now who remembered much about the doctor's early life, but forty years ago his courtship and marriage had been considered quite a romantic story. He had not been a rich man then, only a very handsome one, with a heart open to the sorrows of all, and a hand ready to hold out to help wherever he could. His practice in those days had been chiefly amongst the poor; indeed, there were not many rich either in the little town or its near neighbourhood, but amongst these few rich people

was an old lady who lived in a pretty place five miles out of Westbourne with her only daughter; and through the doctor's great goodness to the poor, and especially to one young girl in whom she was deeply interested, it came to pass that when this old lady was seized with a serious illness—the first she had ever known since she came to Westbourne—she would have no one to attend her but the young doctor who had been so compassionate to the poor girl, whose history she had heard from her coachman.

And thus it had happened that Doctor Andrewes, as the results of his kindness to a destitute girl who had nothing but gratitude wherewith to repay him, had found not only the best of wives, but a considerable fortune. People who knew nothing of the circumstances beyond the fact that he had won and married a rich girl, said he had been very clever in feathering his nest so well; but the truth was that the fortune his wife possessed had long kept him back from seeking to win the heart of the girl who had won his by the sweet gentleness of her character, and especially by her unselfish devotion to her mother.

"If she had not a fortune," he had said to himself over and over again, "I would ask her to let me spend my life in working for her and making her happy;" and he might perhaps have been foolish enough to indulge this, as he considered, honourable feeling to the blighting of his own life and that of another still dearer to him than his own, had not a kind providence prevented. Mothers' eyes are quick to see and mothers' hearts to sympathize, and one day the old lady drew the secret out of two young hearts; and the result was that, before her illness ended in death, she had the happiness of seeing her only child, soon to be left a very friendless orphan, given into the care of a husband worthy of her. The family property was entailed and passed to a distant cousin, and by his wife's wish the doctor con-

tinued to practise in Westbourne, renting, expressly to please her, the quaint old house which in former days had been a convent, and was still called the Priory-house, in Highboro' street ; and there they had ever since made their happy home, a home of perfect sunshine, save for the one shadow thrown over it by the absence of little feet and voices to make glad music in the old house.

The affection which the doctor and his wife had formed for Hope Savile had done much to dispel this shadow for a time, but it had fallen on them again during her absence in France, and now, when they had her once more amongst them, sunshine returned with her.

The very flowers seemed brighter, and the birds in the cages appeared to sing more gladly on this summer afternoon when her little figure flitted about the pretty drawing-room, until, having satisfied herself that she had made acquaintance with everything in it, she again resumed her low chair beside Mrs. Andrewes.

Similar thoughts to those which had come into Mrs. Andrewes' mind on a previous occasion found their way into the doctor's now as he watched them lovingly. They made, he thought, a strangely pretty picture—the fairy-like girl, with her golden hair, no longer now in long curls, but gathered in a thick coil at the back of her little head, sitting in the newest fashion of French attire, chattering merrily, with her hands clasped on the knees of the old lady, who might have served as a model of a good old English lady of the good old English time, as she sat in her carved oak arm-chair, dressed in rich black silk with deep white ruffles at the throat and sleeves, and her silver hair arranged in tiny curls under her high cap. But the picture was soon broken up by the entrance of the butler with the tiny old-fashioned cups and saucers, when Hope claimed the privilege of pouring out the coffee, making the doctor keep

his place, whilst she waited upon him and Mrs. Andrewes as though she had been, as they so fondly wished she were, the child of their old age. Home cares were forgotten for the time, and it did not seem as though two whole hours could possibly have passed when the butler again appeared, this time to say that the brougham was at the door.

"You will come again soon, my child," said Mrs. Andrewes, holding her hand between both her own.

"Whenever I can. I am always so happy here," said Hope.

"Without anything to make you so but the happiness your own presence brings with it," replied Mrs. Andrewes.

"Oh, how can you say so," exclaimed Hope; "why I love everything in this house with all my heart, from my dear old friend the mandarin, shaking his head at me still from the top of that shelf just as he used when I was here last, to the peacock's feathers painted on the table, where I have poured out coffee so often into these dear old cups. If you only knew how I love to come here, you would not talk about there not being anything to make me happy."

But Dr. Andrewes bade them remember that while they were paying compliments to each other, "Rhubarb and Magnesia" were catching cold in the street.

So once more Hope was folded softly in the gentle old lady's motherly embrace, and half an hour later she was again in the cold, stiff house at Marylands.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOPE Savile was giving her father his luncheon in the library when Dr. Andrewes came in.

"Don't let me disturb you," he said. "I'm earlier than I intended to be, having found some patients out whom I expected to see; but I'll just take the newspaper and wait. Don't mind me."

And retiring to a corner of the room behind the invalid's chair he spread the morning paper before his face, and then, like the sly old man that he could be at times, in spite of the honest face and voice, which seemed an unmistakable index to the most unfailing uprightness of nature, he watched from behind his screen all that was going on.

It was quite a new thing for Mr. Savile to get up for luncheon. He had told the doctor yesterday that it was since he had had such a good appetite for his breakfast that he had felt strong enough to get up earlier, and that as this enabled him to get out in his chair a good hour sooner he enjoyed his drives much more. Dr. Andrewes had asked him in return for this information what he considered to be the cause of this improvement of appetite, and consequent increase of strength. Mr. Savile could not say, but the doctor, watching from behind the newspaper, thought he could.

To begin with, he had never before seen Mr. Savile's luncheon presented to him in such a tempting way. The food no doubt was prepared as usual, the cook was a first-

rate one, but the little tray had evidently been arranged by another hand than Ben's. There was even a lovely rose on it in a brightly shining glass vase, as it stood on a small table by the invalid's chair. Two or three times Dr. Andrewes heard him assert faintly that he had surely taken enough, and each time Hope's sweet voice coaxed him to take only just a little more, "a very, very little," in such winning tones, that the old doctor said to himself that *he* himself could not have refused her, even had it been a question of some of his own most horrid drugs instead of roast lamb and custard pudding.

Her father's luncheon over, Hope was leaving the room, when the doctor stopped her.

"I wanted to know," he said, "whether you would come with me for a ride this afternoon. You have not forgotten how to ride, I suppose?"

"I hope not," she replied; "though I have not had any riding since I went away except on mules and donkeys."

"Well then, make haste and get ready, and I'll take you back with me to Westbourne in the brougham. I told them to have the mare ready in case I wanted her, and this will be a lovely day for the sands."

Hope's eyes glistened with delight, but she hesitated.

"It's very kind of you," she said. "I shall enjoy it *so* much if I may come some other day; but I was going out with papa to-day. Do you know I have such a grand piece of news to give you. I made him come right up to the Beacon with me yesterday, and it did him ever so much good. It was a change from the garden and shrubbery; and you were not a bit tired, were you, papa?"

Mr. Savile did not answer. His luncheon had made him sleepy, and he had gone off into a little doze while Hope and the doctor were talking, and Ben was waiting outside the window with the wheel-chair.

"Well," said the doctor, "that is news; and pray how long did you keep your father up at the Beacon, amongst all the fashionable folk?"

"He stayed nearly an hour—at least we were an hour gone from the house, for we were not back until four o'clock; but we did not come in for the fashionable folk. The fine ladies and gentlemen don't come till four. There were not very many people there, and some of them papa was quite glad to see. They came up and talked to him, and I am sure it did him good."

"I am sure it did, too," said the doctor. "Take him there again to-day, and when you get back put on your riding habit, and wait for me. I'll be here soon after four—James shall bring over the mare. It's too fine a day for the sands to be lost."

"Oh, thank you," said Hope; "that *will* be nice. We're not going to the Beacon, however, because the band plays there on Wednesdays, and I don't think papa could bear the noise; and, besides, the 'fashionable folk' will be there much earlier on band days."

"What a wise little woman it is to be sure!" exclaimed the doctor. "Well, take him where you like, since you're so clever in finding out just what is best for him; only don't lose time over it, for you've to be back here by four, remember."

And the doctor took his departure as Hope roused her father, beckoning to Ben to assist her in wrapping him up for his drive. It was a pretty sight to see the fair young girl checking her light steps to a pace that suited the slow progress of the wheel-chair, as she walked close beside it, her sweet face turned constantly to the invalid, as she roused him from the drowsiness into which he was so ready to fall, by pointing his attention first to one thing and then another.

When they came in, she gave him herself his cup of chocolate, left him in Ben's charge while she dressed for her ride, and returned to the library, to wait there for Dr. Andrewes.

For the first time since she had come from France Mr. Savile seemed struck with his daughter's appearance.

She had come and gone about the house for nearly a fortnight as a vision of beauty in the eyes of all who saw her. Ben and the butler in the pantry, cook and the kitchen-maid in the kitchen, the housekeeper and the housemaids at their meals, and Miss Lucilla with her lady's-maid over her toilet, had made her golden hair and her fair complexion, her large eyes and her sweet mouth, the rosy lips of which parted so readily into either bright smiles or pleasant words, the daily subject of their idle talk; but never yet could any one have told whether or not Mr. Savile had taken any notice of all these things until to-day.

When she returned to the library, however, in her riding costume, he was evidently startled by the sight of her.

The tight-fitting riding-habit, which had once been her young mother's, displayed to advantage the exquisite proportions of her graceful figure: her masses of golden hair, loosened from the coil in which they were usually bound, hung in rich profusion over her pretty shoulders—her hair always came down when she rode, so it was useless, she had said, to hope to keep it up—her clear complexion was tinged to the loveliest rose by her walk in the fresh air, and her dark eyes shone with the double happiness of a sweet duty just fulfilled and a great enjoyment close at hand. She was a rare picture of youthful beauty, innocence, and happiness.

Mr. Savile was roused into a perception of it. As she came up to him, gathering together with one little white-gloved hand the long folds of her dark blue habit, the

colour of which seemed to throw out into richer beauty the golden mass of hair that reached below her slight waist, and holding in the other hand her jewelled riding-whip, which had been one of her father's earliest presents to her beautiful mother, he fixed his pale blue eyes on her, and kept them riveted there. We can scarcely say that much expression found its way into them; it seemed as though the power of expression had gone from the wan, feeble face; but large tears gathered in them, overflowed them, and coursed each other slowly down the thin drawn cheeks.

"Hope," he said; "Hope!" in a dreamy, disturbed, questioning voice.

Hope was frightened.

"Yes, dear papa!" she said, letting her long skirts fall on the ground and putting her arms round his neck to kiss him. "What is it, papa?"

She put her hand in his; he held it fast. She laid his head on her shoulder, grieved to see its nervous tremor, which she had hoped was passing away altogether. He looked up into her face, keeping his eyes fixed there.

"It *is* Hope," he said—"my daughter Hope."

"Of course it *is* Hope," she exclaimed, retaining her composure with an effort. "Surely you know me, papa."

What could have so strangely overcome him in these few moments of time? His next words told her.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I know you. It is my Hope—not Mary—not my wife;" and he burst into tears, a loud fit of that childish sobbing which was *the* thing that exhausted him most, and that was especially to be avoided. Hope had no idea what to do, nor had she any time to think; but the God to whom her heart was lifted, although almost unconsciously, guided her impulses to do just what was best.

"You took me for mamma," she said, "dear, dear papa! They all say I am so like her. You thought she had come

back to you ; and so she *has*, in the person of her little daughter—*your* little daughter, dear papa. I am come to be to you again what she was, to nurse you and comfort you, and take care of you—*her* Hope, *your* Hope.”

He had not seemed to pay much heed to her words, which were clearly uttered, though she felt that there were what she had often heard them call in France “*des larmes dans sa voix* ;” but when she ceased speaking, his sobs ceased, and he almost whispered the words—so exhausted was his strength, so feeble the tone, “Yes, yes, *her* Hope, my Hope ; she is my Hope.”

All this time Hope had not once thought of Ben, who had retired behind his master’s chair, and had stood there, more than once drying with his coat-sleeve the eyes that, in spite of all his efforts, would keep moistening. He would not leave Hope alone with his master, fearing a return of one of his attacks ; and it was well that he did not, for at that moment, so unfortunately (as it seems to us) do things sometimes happen, a horse’s hoofs were heard galloping up to the door.

“Oh, it is the doctor !” exclaimed Hope, awaking at the same moment to the remembrance of Ben’s presence ; “bring him in, Ben.”

But Ben knew that it was not the doctor. He recognized the rapid, reckless pace. He knew who the comer was, and exactly in what condition, before the door was thrown open and a loud voice was heard calling for him.

“Oh, Ben, it’s Mr. Frank !”

“Yes, Miss Hope, but don’t you mind ; you stay with master.”

And Ben had left the room and closed the door, before the call was again repeated. But the closed door did not prevent her distinctly hearing, and trembling all over at the next words that reached her.

"Where's Miss Hope?"

There was no reply, and Hope's very heart went up in a silent appeal to Heaven; she did not know for what, but God was there, and He could help—as He truly did. At that moment another, and oh what a welcome, sound was heard along the path—horse's steps again, but this time steady and firm.

In another minute the doctor was in the room, and behind him Frank, his handsome face red with drinking, his eyes excited as Hope had never yet seen them.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed, at sight of Hope in her riding attire, looking in her flushed excitement and alarm, if possible, even more lovely than before; "but this *is* grand. I came to fetch you, my dear, but I never expected to find you got up in this style in readiness. Come along."

Hope trembled from head to foot; Mr. Savile was shaking no less violently.

"Go with Frank, dear," said the doctor, "only just wait a moment for me in the hall. I've a message for you, but I must attend to your father first. Ben."

Ben came at once. He too looked to the doctor as help sent from God. With a strange courage at her heart, inspired by the consciousness that it was so, Hope obeyed and left the room.

"Give your master a double dose of the soothing mixture, and watch him till I come back," said the doctor; and following Hope and Frank out of the library, he led the way across the hall into the dining-room. When Frank and Hope had followed him into it, he closed the door and said,

"Hope, I want to speak to your brother. Run upstairs to your room for a few minutes, like a good child, and leave us together."

And he re-opened the door for Hope to obey, as she had thankfully prepared to do.

But Frank was too quick both for him and for her. He stepped quickly, albeit very unsteadily, between Hope and the door, banged it, set his back against it, and said rudely,

"Thank you, old gentleman, but *I* want Hope. She has to come with me to the Beacon. I've got a heavy bet on it, and you don't think I'm going to be cheated out of it by you, do you?"

Then, with a change of voice and manner which were far more dreadful to Hope than this rude bluster, he said,

"Look here, Hope; you don't think I would do you any harm, do you? I've only made a bet with some fellows that I've been lunching with, that I'll bring a prettier girl down to the Beacon to-day than any one of them. It's a jolly heavy bet, too, and they can't cheat me out of it if the girl *is* my own sister. It's the first time they've seen you with me, and I'm up in my luck at finding you dressed in this fashion, for"—with an oath—"I never saw you look half so handsome before."

The doctor was at his wits' end. From the depth of his heart he apostrophized himself as an old idiot for having ever let Frank come to Westbourne. With all his heart he wished Hope back at Beaumanoir. He really did not know what to do to avoid frightening her out of her senses, and creating a scene which might be the death of Mr. Savile. But for these two reflections he would—seeing that he was an old man and growing feeble, and that Frank was a young man and very powerful—have summoned James with a call from the window, and turned Frank out of the house by force. But he dreaded the commotion that resistance would create, and he could not devise any scheme of stratagem; so that even the doctor considered it a providence when, for the third time that afternoon, horses' feet were heard along the gravelled path, and James moved his

master's bay "Rhubarb" and the mare saddled for Hope to ride, to make room for the cream-coloured ponies, that were bringing Miss Lucilla back from her luncheon with her friends and her drive with them to the Beacon, at a most unexpectedly early hour.

Much surprised that the coachman's ring did not bring Ben to the door, her mind misgave her that there was something the matter with her brother, and she inquired of James.

"Don't know of nothing, ma'am," replied the dull lad, "save that I had orders to bring the mare and come along with master. We've been here a mortal time, me and the groom yonder, holding these horses."

The "groom yonder" was Frank's, and so was the horse he held; and concluding that Frank was the cause of whatever had gone wrong, Miss Lucilla gave the reins to "Buttons," and went into the house and to the library, where she found Mr. Savile in the half-sleep, half-stupor produced by the dose, and Ben watching him.

A few words from Ben explained what had happened, and Miss Lucilla took her way to the dining-room, where, however, she failed to effect an immediate entrance from the fact of her nephew being still standing against the door. He retreated, however, as she pressed against it, and Miss Lucilla made her way into the little group.

Scarcely knowing what she did, Hope made a faint attempt to escape through the half-open door; but Frank laid his hand quickly on her shoulder, and whether from the sudden terror which his action inspired, or that she had been ready to do so before he touched her, she could not herself have told, but with a faint cry, she fell forward in a dead faint, and would have fallen to the ground, had not Doctor Andrewes caught her in his arms. Without a word he laid her on the ground, her face white as marble,

her little hands hanging motionless by her side ; she looked as though she were dead, and Frank thought she was.

"Fetch some salts—call for cold water," said the doctor, as he threw open the window, and Miss Lucilla obeyed, greatly alarmed, for never before had Hope fainted, and this was such a dead, long faint. Nearly half an hour elapsed before she had recovered sufficiently to recognize them, though once or twice she had opened her eyes and looked round in unconsciousness.

"Go," said the doctor to Frank, seeing her fix her eyes for a moment on him. "You have done your best to kill her; at all events don't prevent our doing our best to save her."

To his surprise Frank turned and went without a word, only, however, to return to his companions and drown in drink the faint rousings of remorse, which his alarm for his sister had awoke in his conscience. He did not return until midnight, and then in a condition which prevented his having any remembrance of the circumstances under which he had left.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEXT morning, Frank had recovered his senses sufficiently to lead him to inquire from Ben how Miss Hope was.

"She was very bad for some hours," said Ben. There were occasions when he positively could not frame his mouth to say "sir" to his young master. "There was no one allowed in her room but Miss Savile and Margery. The doctor was in a great way about her, and about master too, for he had one of his worst attacks after you left. However you can go on as you do," he added, "and see the misery you bring on your poor old father and that lovely young lady, is more than I can understand; and all for the sake of that awful drink which is killing you as well as them."

"Who taught me to drink, I wonder," said Frank, taking the reproof, however, with wonderful meekness. "Wasn't it through playing with you in the stable-yards at Wallingford? Didn't we both learn the same lesson from the same master—that drunken old butler of my grandfather's?"

"Who has gone where no words of ours can follow him," replied Ben. "But oh, Master Frank, you say just the truth. He taught us both the same lesson. It was the drink that he used to give us—you and me—of a night in the pantry, to keep us quiet while he and his companions were drinking and gambling, that first gave us the love of the horrid thing. But, Master Frank, didn't I learn that

lesson as well—or, rather, as badly as you? and have I not unlearned it? Isn't there a better Master than him, and a stronger one too? and if we only ask Him, He will help us to unlearn those dreadful lessons that lead to perdition of body and soul."

Frank laughed, but not as scornfully as Ben had been accustomed to hear him laugh sometimes when he had allowed him to speak to him on this subject; for, as a general rule, Ben's attempts to "preach," as Frank called it, were met by an order to "shut up," if not by some less pleasant prohibition.

"You mean your temperance leader, do you? Well, I think he'd scarcely care to have me in his class, if I wanted to join."

"Oh, Master Frank," said Ben, "you know I don't mean him. It's little enough he could do for me if I hadn't another and a greater Master than he to teach me the right way and keep me straight. Oh, Master Frank, if you only knew how often I ask Him to bring *you* into the right way too."

"Then why don't he do it?" said Frank, with another laugh. "If he's such a good master as you make him out to be, it seems to me he might do just that much to oblige you."

"Master Frank, please don't speak like that. You know very well I mean the Lord Jesus Himself. It was He that brought me out of my evil ways. It's true that it was our new curate down at Wallingford that taught me about Him, and it's true that it's a great help to belong to the temperance society; but oh, Master Frank! when one is tied and bound with the chains of sin as I was—those are the very words of the prayer-book, and I'm sure they are true, if ever words were—it wasn't the curate, nor it wasn't anything else that could have set me free, but only the

Lord Jesus Himself. You *are* tied and bound, Master Frank, and you know you are. Do, for the dear Lord's sake, ask Him to set you free."

But Frank had had enough of Ben's preaching ; indeed it was marvellous that he had allowed him to speak so long, and even now that he should not seem angry, nor disposed to swear at him, or throw his boots at him, as he had done many times before on much slighter provocation.

"Go along with you," was all he said, "and fetch some hot water for me. You're paid to do your work in this house, you know, and not to preach. If I want to hear a sermon I can go to church. What I want you for now is to come and shave me—my hand shakes so villainously this morning."

"You'll forgive me," said Ben, adding a "sir" now—"you'll forgive me, sir, if I've been too bold in speaking. You'll bear in mind that it's just through my great regard for you that I can't help it. I can't forget the time when we were boys together, and used to play down in the yard and the garden at Wallingford ; and there, I can't for the life of me help speaking sometimes, when you'll listen to me." And Ben went for the hot water.

Frank looked at his retreating figure as he left the room, as fine a young fellow as one could wish to see, with a steady step and a happy, honest countenance. He remembered the time when Ben, yet quite a boy, had been turned off his grandfather's premises—turned off by the very butler who had taught him to drink—for being found tipsy in the hay-loft with a candle beside him burnt down to the socket. He had refused to believe his aunt Lucilla when she had showed him a letter she had received from an old servant at Wallingford, now married to the first hotel-keeper there, to whom she had written to inquire if she could recommend any of their boys as a groom, and who had informed her in

reply that she was anxious to find a nice place for Ebenezer Brown, who was wishing to "better himself" that he might be able to do more to help his widowed mother.

"Ebenezer Brown"—surely that was the name of the drunken boy of whom she had heard as having nearly set the place on fire. She appealed to Frank, who confirmed the fact; "The same name," he said, "but not the same boy. Poor Ebenezer Brown was drinking himself to death at fifteen. He certainly was not the most respectable, honest, trustworthy lad any one could wish to see at twenty."

Was he not? Miss Lucilla wrote again to inquire, and received for reply that "it *was* the very same lad. Mrs. Holdsworthy had not known it when she recommended him; but she had inquired of him, and found that he was the very boy. That was five years ago," she added, "before the new curate came, and before the days of the Band of Hope, of which work Ebenezer had been one of the firstfruits. He signed the pledge, and had never broken it since. But that was not all: he became a truly good lad, and after having had him for three years in their own service, and seen for themselves the temptations which he had resisted, she felt she could give him the highest of characters."

So Ebenezer Brown came to Marylands, where his only apparent disqualification being his name, it was abbreviated to Ben. He had been engaged as groom, but his appearance was so good, his manners so pleasing, and his character so reliable, that when Mr. Savile became so infirm he was constituted his personal attendant; and of late months, since Frank's return from the Continent, soon after which he had obtained the commission which he was now in such danger of losing, he had become quite as much his attendant as his father's.

It had been a great trouble to Ben to find his former

young master and companion so frightfully addicted to the vice from which he had himself been delivered, and the honest fellow made it his daily prayer that God would save "Mr. Frank" as He had saved him.

"There's less hope for him, I'm afraid, than there was for me," he would say to himself sometimes, after having almost carried Frank upstairs and got him to bed. "He's a gentleman, and the parsons don't seem to go after the gentry as they do after the poor folk, a-warning them of their danger and a-trying to save them. To be sure they speak up in church, but them that need it most are often never there to hear them. Mr. Frank never sets his foot in the church. Then he's got loads of money: that helps to make it easier for him to kill himself, body and soul. Such a handsome gentleman as he is, and with such lots of money, though they do say that he's spending it at an awful rate, drinking and gambling and the like. That's the way with those who give way to drink: it's the beginning of *everything* that's bad, as I know."

And Ben would recall his own past times of degradation and poverty and misery, contrasting them with the present days of comfort and respectability and happiness, until he felt as if he would do anything—as if he must do something to save Mr. Frank, if only out of gratitude for the mercy that had saved him.

He went now to fetch the hot water, so occupied with thoughts of his young master, that he did not perceive that he had over-filled his can until cook called his attention to his carelessness.

"I don't want to clean my place over again for you, as well as for your master," she said. "Coming straight through my kitchen as he did last night, with his muddy boots on. You might have made him take them off in the lobby, I should think."

"He was *that* bad last night, I couldn't make him do anything," replied Ben. "It's only a marvel that he found his way home at all, by the back door or the front."

Cook bestowed an opprobrious epithet on Frank, which Ben did not echo. He had been as bad himself once, and those who have realised what sin is by their own experience are not ready to condemn others, but only to pity and seek to rescue them.

"You'd better get him to sign the pledge like yourself," said cook.

"I only wish I could," replied Ben, little imagining what thoughts were at that moment passing in Frank's mind; "but I've almost lost hope."

"As for his preaching," his young master had said to himself as he watched Ben out of the room, "that's all cant and bosh; but there's some truth in what the fellow says about the drink being a cursed thing. And as for that old brute of a butler down at Wallingford, I've cursed his very memory myself many and many a time for the mischief he did me. Why was I turned away from Upton school?—for smuggling bottles of wine into the dormitories, and getting the other fellows to drink with me. Why was I expelled from Rotherley?—because the old landlady sent word to the master that I had got tipsy down at her place and could not get back. Why was I rusticated from college, but because I was found drunk in the 'quad;' and now if I don't look sharp I shall get the sack from the colonel. And I *can't* look sharp. That's just the mischief: I can't keep from the drink, though I know that I'm a fool for my pains. I should never have been such an idiot as to have bet that last hundred pounds yesterday, if I'd been quite sober. And now there's another debt to pay—thanks to that old fool Pill-box. If he hadn't been there, I believe I could have got Hope to come up to the Beacon just for one turn."

And his thoughts being diverted now into another channel by the remembrance of his debts, he was trying to count them up, beginning over and over again, and not able to arrive at any conclusion in his very confused state of brains, when Ben returned with the hot water. One glance at his young master showed that his fit of good temper had been very transient ; but although he was as cross and irritable as it was now becoming usual for him to be, and swore at Ben as freely as ever, yet the faithful young fellow's words had found their way into his master's mind.


Meanwhile Miss Lucilla and Dr. Andrewes sat together in the library consulting as to what had better be done. Had Miss Lucilla been of a more generous nature than she was, she would have been completely deprived even of all desire to triumph over the good doctor by the ready avowal which he made of having been most decidedly in the wrong, when he not only advised, but himself arranged, Frank's return to Maryland. But Miss Lucilla was not one of those rare women who never care to say, "I told you so." On the contrary, to prove herself right was one of the chief pleasures of her life, and her proudest moments might be said to be those in which others besides herself allowed that she was so.

"I see," said the doctor, "I see plainly I made a dreadful mistake, and now others are reaping the consequence of it. To be sure I had no idea that Frank was what he is. The colonel spoke of habits of drinking and of debt ; but who would have imagined that he was as bad as he is ?"

"I would," said Miss Lucilla. "If I had had my way he would never have come, and now that he is here I don't know how to get rid of him."

"Nor what would become of him if you did get rid of him," replied the doctor.

This question had not arisen in Miss Lucilla's mind, nor did she give much thought to it now.



"He'll drink himself to death somehow and somewhere," she said. "I've made up my mind to that long ago.

"That's rather a terrible conclusion to come to, especially as regards one's own nephew—is it not?" said the doctor.

His tone of mingled sarcasm and severity was lost on Miss Lucilla.

"So it may be," she said; "but one can't come to any other."

"So that you think the best thing to be done is to make up one's mind to this conclusion as comfortably as possible, and try to arrange, since the poor fellow must go to ruin, that he goes there with as little inconvenience to his family as may be. 'The heart does not grieve for what the eye does not see'—is that what you mean?"

Miss Lucilla thought the doctor disposed to be rude, and showed by her manner that she did so.

"Excuse me," he said, "if I speak plainly; but I am terribly grieved for this young fellow, though he is no relation of mine. It's an awful sight to see one of God's creatures, and such a fine one as this youth was meant to be—a handsome young fellow as he is even now—wrecking the fine frame his Creator gave him, and going to destruction as fast as he can go."

"He was a bad boy always," said his aunt.

"I don't suppose he was a worse baby than other babies," replied the doctor.

"Perhaps not," said Miss Lucilla, "he certainly was a beautiful one; his poor father was quite foolishly proud of him. So was his grandfather. It was all the old gentleman's fault that he was so spoiled—allowed to have his own way and associate with servants. Hope was just as much indulged, and it did her harm enough too; but of course it's different with girls."

"Were the children much with you?" asked the doctor.

"No ; I never cared for children," she replied, "and spoiled children were always my abhorrence. I never could have any patience with Frank."

Poor Frank ! The doctor felt disposed to say that even on her own showing there was much excuse to be made for him ; but he refrained, and returned to the subject from which they had wandered—what had better be done to remedy the mistake he had made in bringing about his return home. That this step had been a mistake, its unfortunate results seemed to prove. And yet if the young man had been forbidden his father's house, where would he have gone ? Dr. Andrewes was not a religious man, but he said to himself that surely some effort should be made to save this youth, and whose duty was it to make it if not his nearest relations ?

CHAPTER XVIII.

SITTING beside her father, who had dropped off to sleep with his hand in hers, Hope by a different train of thought had been quietly reaching the same conclusion.

She had been very poorly for some time after her recovery from her long faint, but at length the doctor's medicines succeeded in sending her into a quiet sleep, which lasted till early morning, when she awoke to find the little housemaid Margery, a gentle, quiet girl, who was Hope's special favourite, sitting beside her reading, as Hope perceived, a Bible by the light of a well-shaded lamp.

She closed her book when she saw that Hope was awake, and coming to her with some refreshment that was in readiness for her, asked her how she was in a tone of real interest.

"Fancy my not knowing that you were here," said Hope ; "I must have been very sound asleep. But why did you sit up? I was not ill enough for any one to sit up with me. It was only a fainting fit."

"But it was a very bad faint, Miss," said Margery, "and the doctor said you were not to be left alone. Miss Lucilla told Mrs. Perkins she was to remain, but she said she was a coward at night; and so I begged to be allowed to stay, and they said I might."

"It was very good of you," said Hope. "I'm afraid you must be very tired. What o'clock is it?"

"Just gone three by the chimes," said Margery. "If you

please, miss, you must take this beef tea, for the doctor bid me mind that you drank it directly you woke. He didn't much like trusting me to stay till I told him that I had been accustomed to sit up night after night, and there wasn't any fear of my falling asleep."

"Have you minded many sick people?" asked Hope, as she drank the beef tea.

"Only my mother, miss; but there was no one else but me to mind her all through her illness."

"Was she long ill?" said Hope, with quick sympathy.

"More than a year, miss, and it was a very dreadful illness; but I was thankful to be with her all through. She was such a good mother to me. I would not have liked any one else to mind her."

"They would not let me mind my mother," said Hope. "They sent me away. They said I was too young to be with any one so ill."

"I was very young, too, when my mother was so bad," said Margery; "I was not quite sixteen; but poor people are not like ladies."

"I think sometimes they are happier," said Hope. "They are so much more useful. It must have been a great comfort to you to nurse your mother yourself."

"Indeed it was, miss, it was my one comfort. But I think, Miss Hope, it's the rich people that are useful. One can do so much when one has money to do it with."

"Money can't do anything sometimes," said Hope.

And she thought how little money could do to help her father, or to save Frank; and even as she was thinking this, the silence of the quiet night was disturbed by the sounds which, though they did not now alarm her, since she knew what they were, always turned her sick at heart—the sounds of bolts being drawn back, and then of dragging footsteps.

Margery well knew also what the noise was. She said not a word, only as the footsteps drew nearer, dragging up the stairs and then passing the door of the bedroom, and she saw the look on Hope's face, her heart ached for her. Miss Hope had said truly, she thought, that there were troubles which money could neither prevent nor cure.

Not long after, Ben's light step repassed the door, and then all was silent—so still that they could hear the ticking of the clock on the stairs.

"May I shake up your pillows?" said Margery; "and won't you try to go to sleep?"

But Hope did not feel as if she should sleep any more that night.

"I have been asleep ever since yesterday, you know, Margery," she said, with one of the bright smiles which Margery had now for some time reckoned it amidst her chief delights to receive from her young mistress, if only she passed her on the stairs or came across her in her daily work; "but you have had no sleep. You must go to bed now, and not get up till you are rested."

But Margery would not hear of leaving her. She would not even consent to lie down on the sofa and sleep there.

"Shall I read to you, miss?" she said; "perhaps if I read you might go off to sleep again."

"I don't think that is likely," said Hope, "but I should like you to read to me very much. Will you read me my evening chapter which I missed last night? That's a Bible on the table by you, I see. Is it yours?"

Margery blushed, and said "Yes."

"It's a very nice one," said Hope; "so prettily bound. May I see it?"

With a still deeper blush Margery handed her the Bible, which, after all, was not to be read that night.

Hope saw there was some feeling connected with the

book, and concluded it had been her mother's. But it opened at the title-page, and she read the words, "Margery Pittmann; from her true and faithful Ebenezer Brown."

"Ben gave it to you," she said; "dear, good Ben. Is he a great friend of yours, Margery?"

"We are engaged to be married," said Margery quietly, "only it won't be for a long time yet, Miss Hope, because we're both so young; and besides, Ben has an old mother that mostly depends on his money for her maintenance, and of course he must think of her first."

"I'm so glad to know it," said Hope; "you'll have a good husband, Margery."

"I know I shall, Miss Hope; and it makes me happy to feel how pleased mother would be if she could know it too."

"Perhaps she does," said Hope; "we can't tell, you know, Margery, how much our dear ones in paradise know of our joys on earth. Perhaps your mother *does* know."

"Well, Miss Hope, I hope she does, because you see, miss, it seemed her great anxiety about me."

"What did?" asked Hope.

"Why, miss, about my marrying. It seemed the last thought, the last earthly care that she had got on her mind."

"But you said you were only sixteen when your mother died, Margery."

"So no more I was, Miss Hope, and of course there was not a thought about my marrying then; but you see, miss, mother was leaving me alone in the world. I was in service already, and she knew I would have to keep in service all my life, with no one to look much after me—leastways, not as a mother would; and she knew, too, that it's marriage that most times either makes or mars a girl's life, and so she had this thought very great on her mind."

Hope's face was flushed with the eagerness of her interest. A second link of sympathy was formed between herself and this simple little servant-maid.

"Your father was dead?" she said.

This time it was Margery's turn to flush up. She hesitated for a moment before replying. Then remembering the sounds they had only so lately heard, she felt that she could say to Hope what she could not have said to others.

"He is dead now, Miss Hope, but he was not dead then. But it was worse for us than if he had been, for he drank dreadfully. He was away on a spree all those last days when mother was so ill, Miss Hope; he never came back until after she was dead. I knew it was because she knew so well what an unhappy marriage is that she spoke up as she did to me about marrying. It seemed as though she had scarcely strength to speak at all, and as if she forced up her last powers of speech to say those words."

"I wish you would tell me what they were," said Hope—"that is, if you don't the least mind; don't tell me if you'd rather not."

"Oh, I like to tell you, miss; it does me good to talk to you, if you're quite sure it doesn't hurt you, when you ought to be trying to go to sleep."

"I tell you, Margery, I can't sleep any more; do tell me what your mother said."

Could Margery's mother have said the same thing to Margery that her dear mother had said to her on that well-remembered afternoon, when for the last time in her life she sat beside her, with her hand in hers?

It was indeed the same thing, only uttered in other words.

"She laid it on my very soul, Miss Hope," said Margery, "as I loved her—and, oh! she knew that I *did* love her, my dear, good, suffering mother—she laid it on my soul, as I loved her, and as I loved my own soul and the dear Lord who gave His life to save it, that I would never marry any one who was not good, really and truly good, loving and serving God."

"And Ben is really good," said Hope.

"Indeed he is, Miss Hope!"

"What a happy thing for you, Margery, that you should have become attached to him, and that thus it should be easy for you to obey your dear mother's last request."

"It was more than a request," said Margery, "it was her dying charge—such a solemn charge; I dared not disobey it!"

Again Hope said, "What a blessing, then, for you that it has been made so easy for you to fulfil it."

The pink colour deepened again in Margery's round dimpled cheeks.


"Yes, Miss Hope, it is indeed, for it *is* easy now. God has made it easy. But I ought to tell you, miss, that it did not always seem so. You're so good to me, Miss Hope, I shouldn't like you to think better of me than I deserve. It wasn't always easy: it ~~was~~ very hard once."

Hope could not have questioned Margery any further, but her speaking eyes expressed the interest she felt, and Margery continued—

"It seems wonderful, Miss Hope. I dare say you'd never be able to understand it. I scarcely can myself sometimes, when I look back upon it. It seems so strange that after all one has seen of the misery of doing wrong things, and the warnings one has had, that yet we should be so sore tempted to commit the very same sin ourselves that we have seen bring such misery to others."

"You were tempted to marry some one that was not good?" said Hope.

"Yes, Miss Hope, sore tempted; if it had not been for those words of mother's I believe I should have done it. For you see, Miss Hope, I did not care about God then as I do now. It was not the thought of God's law, but of mother's love, and of her dying words, that kept me back."



"You must be very thankful," said Hope, again longing to hear further details of Margery's temptation and Margery's victory; yet quite unable to ask for one word more than the girl's heart prompted her to tell.

"Thankful, Miss Hope! oh, indeed I am thankful. I can't often bear to think of it, and it's very seldom I speak of it. I've never spoken of it until to-night to any one but Ben, and very seldom to him. For indeed, Miss Hope, it was a terrible temptation, and a wonderful deliverance. We were fellow-servants in the same situation. He was head-footman, Miss Margery, and I just an under-housemaid; and he was so much above me, and moreover so handsome and clever and well-educated, that the other servants never could understand his caring for me. But he did, Miss Hope, and he tried hard to make me marry him; only I couldn't with mother's words coming back to me every time I dared to think of it, because you see, miss, he was very gay."

"You didn't think that perhaps you might have made him steady?" said Hope.

"Oh yes, I did. That was just what he used to say to me, and what I used to say to myself; but I could not shut out mother's words that way, and so I gave him up. Mother told me once, Miss Hope, that there wasn't a more fatal form of self-deception than for a girl to think she could make a man steady by marrying him. My poor, poor mother," continued Margery, with a kind of sob in her voice, "I know she had learned *that* from her own experience, for one of my aunts told me after her death, that before she and father were married he signed the pledge to prove to her that he never meant to drink any more, and oh, miss, he hadn't been married a month before he was drinking harder than ever."

"Yet he loved your mother."

"Oh yes, Miss Hope, I'm sure he did at that time from many things that mother has told me, and for a long time afterwards too from many things that I can remember myself. He used to be dreadfully sorry at one time when he had been drinking hard, and there wasn't any money for mother to buy anything for herself and me, but afterwards that passed away; he got not to care. That's how it is, Miss Hope; men who take to drink care at first for the trouble it brings to others; then they drink more that they may care less, and then they come to drink so much that they don't care at all."

Hope did not answer. Indeed her thoughts had been wandering a little whilst Margery was speaking, thinking of Frank.

At last she said, "What is signing the pledge, Margery?"

"Oh, Miss Hope, don't you know?"

"No," said Hope, "I've never been in the way of hearing much about such things, though I have heard a great friend of mine talk about the Band of Hope in her town, and what good it does, and I know they sign their names."

"Yes, Miss Hope, we take a pledge never to drink any strong drinks."

"And have you signed, Margery?"

"Yes, Miss Hope."

"But, Margery," asked Hope, "have not you been confirmed?"

"Yes, Miss Hope."

"Then why should you take any other vow than that, Margery? It seems to me," she added, "that our baptismal vow includes all and everything that is included in your pledge. If people keep their baptismal vow why need they make any other?"

"Ah, Miss Hope, that's just it," exclaimed Margery, eagerly—"if they keep it. But you see, miss, they don't

and won't, and there's many a poor creature has been saved from utter ruin by being brought to sign the pledge, as a help to himself in keeping from the drink, that could never have been made so much as to listen to anything one had to say about religion. I could not go into a talk about it, Miss Hope; I'm not clever enough, and don't understand reasoning; but if you had lived in our town, miss, you would *know*, as I do, that the pledge *is* a marvellous help in keeping people from drink."

"But *you* have signed, Margery; why should you sign?"

And then she regretted having asked the question, for it occurred to her that probably Margery had signed out of sympathy for Ben, and because two walking together are so much less likely to fall. Doubtless she was giving the strength of her steadier steps to preserve his feebler ones from stumbling. It was not so, however, for Margery had signed the pledge long before she had ever made acquaintance with Ebenezer Brown. It had been his great interest in the temperance cause, indeed, that had first led to their mutual friendship when they became fellow-servants at Marylands.

"Well, Miss Hope, I signed for the sake of the other girls in our town," she said, simply, "and especially for the sake of some of the girls who were in the same factory with me."

"But girls are not tempted to drink," said Hope.

"Oh, miss, you don't know, indeed you don't, if you say so. Why it's one of their greatest temptations. You would say so if you had lived in the town where I was brought up. It's just girls that *are* tempted to drink often."

"But how?" asked Hope.

"Ah, miss, I should be sorry to tell you of half the temptations that we poor girls have, especially in factory towns. Girls are led often to do silly things and wrong

things almost before they know what they are doing, and then they are tempted to drink to forget the foolish or wrong things they have done. And then often it's all up with them, because you see, miss, while one keeps from drink one is more likely to remember and repent, but drink drowns thought. You've never lived in a large town, Miss Hope."

"Not to know much about it, Margery. I was to have gone to Ashford before going back to France, but now I don't know whether I shall go or not, or whether I shall return to France or stay here."

"Oh, I do hope you will stay here," said Margery; "the house is so different with you in it. Ben says it makes all the difference between a dark day and a bright one. Before you came home, Miss Hope, we used to say we had all the brightness to ourselves in the kitchen; but since you've been here there's sunshine everywhere."

Hope thought to herself that there had not been much brightness in the library yesterday.

"The sunshine is coming into this room now, Margery," she said; "it must be broad daylight."

"It is past six o'clock," said Margery. "I'll go and call the servants; you will like some breakfast soon, I'm sure, miss," and she was about to leave the room when Hope recalled her.

"Margery," she said, "when first I came home Miss Savile wished me to have a lady's-maid. I think," she added, with the smile of amusement which brought a merry sparkle into her thoughtful eyes, "Miss Savile does not quite approve of my doing so much for myself. At least she has told me several times to employ Perkins."

"Yes, miss, I know."

"How do you know, Margery?"

It had been rather an unguarded reply, as Margery felt. She coloured as she said, "Mrs. Perkins said so, miss."

"Did she?" said Hope; "what did she say?"

Margery hesitated, but Hope pressed the inquiry; she had her reasons for wishing to know. "I should like to know, Margery—unless it was said in confidence, I mean."

"Perhaps, miss, I ought not to have mentioned it, but it was not more to me than the others that it was said. Mrs. Perkins told us one night at supper that Miss Savile wished her to wait on you as well as on her, but that she was engaged to wait on one lady, and not on two. That was one reason why I took courage to ask if I might be allowed to sit up last night—that, and seeing Mrs. Perkins did not wish to; otherwise I should have been afraid she might have accused me of putting myself too forward."

"I am glad you told me," said Hope; "you may be sure I shall not repeat it; only it will make it easy for me to ask Miss Savile what I wish; I should like to have you to wait upon me a little every night and morning—that is to say, if you would like it, Margery."

"Oh, Miss Hope, it's the thing I should like best in the world."

And Margery went away feeling herself repaid a thousand times over for her night's vigil.

Hope felt that she had made a friend that night. She did not now regret the fainting fit of which she had been foolish enough to have felt half-ashamed before.

Dr. Andrewes was no longer the only being in all Westbourne who could sympathize with her. Indeed, the links of sympathy which had that night been riveted between her mind and Margery's were even stronger than those that bound her to the kind old doctor. And the strongest of these links was the dying charge which both these young girls, each in her separate sphere of life, had received from a dear mother, never to let their hearts go out in love to one who was not altogether good and true.

The thought of Victor Raymond rose in Hope's mind as she recalled Margery's description of the handsome, clever lover whom she would not marry because he was not good. She said to herself, however, that there was a great difference between the two, for Margery had said that this man who liked her, and whom she longed to like also, was not steady. And of course Victor Raymond was steady. She did not know why this should be of course, except that he was amiable and refined, and that he was good Mr. Raymond's son and dear Mary Raymond's brother. But she had herself seen reason to believe that he was not religious; and Elsie—Elsie, who was not given either to form rash judgments or to make mistakes—did not think him "altogether true." And then, like a right-minded maiden as she was, she took herself to task for thinking of Victor Raymond at all. He had not come into her life as Margery's friend had done into hers, or at least he had only flashed into it for a moment, and what she had to do now was to let the remembrance of him pass from it altogether.

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT morning when Hope came into the library, after having, very much against her will, remained in bed until the doctor had seen her, she found two matters decided of great moment to her, though of *how* great moment neither she nor any one else suspected for an instant.

It had been with the most extreme satisfaction that Miss Lucilla Savile had heard her nephew declare his intention that day at luncheon to accept an invitation which he had just received from a friend to spend a fortnight with him. Frank had been unusually polite to his aunt during this *tête-à-tête* breakfast; perhaps he really did feel a little ashamed of his yesterday's conduct, and its consequences to Hope and his father, neither of whom appeared at the luncheon-table; or perhaps Ben's words to him whilst dressing had produced some impression. At all events, he seemed so subdued and quiet that Miss Lucilla had less difficulty than one might have imagined in obeying the earnest injunction which the doctor had laid upon her, "not to irritate him, but to keep the peace by any means rather than run the risk of fresh excitement to Mr. Savile." But it was an immense relief to her mind when, opening a letter which the second post had brought, he informed his aunt really quite civilly of the invitation contained, and of his intention to accept it. The prospect of getting him thus out of the way for one half of his remaining leave of absence put Miss Lucilla into the best of tempers.

The second post had also brought a letter for Hope, which was lying on her bed when the doctor came in to see her.

"From the fair Elsie," he said, with his merry laugh, as his eye fell upon it: "the lady Pylades — the female Pythias."

"No," Hope replied; "it's from her mother."

"Dear me! I didn't know that the friendship extended to the mother, and the correspondence also. And is she equally charming with the daughter?"

"I don't know," said Hope; "I should think she must be, but I have never seen her. She writes to ask me to fix a day for going there. Elsie and I were both to have paid a visit to each other's homes these holidays."

"Oh yes, yes; I remember hearing something about it. They live down in Staffordshire, don't they?"

"Yes; and Mrs. Gordon writes to ask me to go as soon as I can. It's such a kind letter. Would you like to read it?"

And she put it into her old friend's hands, saying as she did so, "Of course I can't go now."

The doctor put up his eye-glasses, and read it through with the greatest attention. If Hope had been his own child he could scarcely have taken more interest in all that concerned her.

"Yes," he said, "it is indeed a very kind letter. One can judge pretty well of people by their letters. Mrs. Gordon must be a very nice woman—good, kind, motherly. Why do you think you can't go?"

"I would not leave papa. You said you thought my being with him did him good. He was upset yesterday, I know; but I sha'n't let him see me again dressed like that, since it reminds him so much of my mother. I don't want to leave him again; I want to stay and take care of him,

I have been making up my mind to ask him to let me stay at home altogether."

"Would you like to stay?" said the doctor. "You seem to enjoy your French life very much, and it certainly has not done you any harm. Even I can see that. Would not you like to go back?"

"Not if I can be of any use to papa by staying here. It is a dull life for him, and every one seems to think—at least Ben and the servants do, and you said you did too—that he has been more cheerful lately, until yesterday."

"Oh that was nothing," said the doctor; "it was a merely accidental shock to his nervous system, which will always be very weak. We must expect such accidents to occur occasionally if anything startles him."

"Then will you ask him to let me stay at home with him? If you ask him, and if you tell aunt Lucilla that you recommend it for his health, I don't think she will object."

"Well, well, we'll see," said the doctor; "but how about your going to Ashford?"

"Oh, of course I won't go."

"I don't see why not."

"On papa's account. If I make him more cheerful, I'm sure I ought not to go."

Instead of making any reply to this remark, the doctor asked, "When does Frank's regiment go to Canada?"

"In about three months," Hope replied, wondering what Frank's going to Canada could have to do with her going to Ashford. She did not know that the doctor's present desire was to keep the brother and sister as much as possible apart, he having entirely changed his opinion about the benefit Frank was to receive from Hope's return.

"And he has another month's leave of absence," continued the doctor, evidently pursuing some train of thought to which Hope had no clue. "Well, you may get up as

soon as you've had your luncheon, and it won't do you any harm to go out with your father this fine afternoon. But we must have no more scenes, or your nerves will be the next to suffer."

And Dr. Andrewes took his leave. Greatly pleased was he to hear from Miss Lucilla, with whom he had requested an interview, of this opportune invitation which Frank had received, and which he was intending to accept.

"So much the better; so much the better," he said; "it will get him out of the way for the next fortnight, and in another fortnight he will be returning to his regiment."

"Returning to it; yes," said Miss Lucilla, "but goodness knows for how long. Unless he gives up his present ways of going on it won't be to remain in it, and then I'm sure I don't know what will happen."

"Nor I either," said the doctor. "Let us hope that he *will* give up his ways, and that he may remain in it. He's had a fair warning from his colonel. He must be a fool if he does not see that he means what he says. Anyhow, sufficient unto the day is the evil," he added, quite unconscious that he was quoting Scripture. "I have to think about my patients, and it's a good thing for both of them that this young fellow is taking himself off."

Miss Lucilla smiled, a quiet triumphant smile which would have been more provoking to an irritable man's temper than many words. But the doctor was not an irritable man, and it would have required a much stronger force than the power of Miss Lucilla's sarcasm to have disturbed the steady equilibrium of his perfect self-possession. Indeed, nothing ever seemed to rouse the good doctor's even temper save the seeing or hearing of some wrong-doing, especially if it were done to the weak or the defenceless. Then, indeed, might the doctor's quiet brown eyes be seen to flash, and the colour to mount from his ruddy cheeks into

his very temples, whilst words—few, perhaps, but very strong—would startle those who heard them into the consciousness, never before realised perhaps, that Dr. Andrewes was not quite such an easy-going man as he appeared to be.

Now, however, he only returned Miss Savile's sarcastic smile with one of perfect good temper.

"Yes," he said, "you were right, and I was wrong—an old fool, in fact. Well, having brought or helped to bring this young man here, I'm thankful that Providence is helping to take him away—for a fortnight, you say. Then he comes back for another fortnight. Well, Hope had better spend that last fortnight at Ashford. I find she has just received an invitation from some friends there."

"Indeed!" said Miss Lucilla, ready as usual to take offence; "I have heard nothing of it."

"Have you seen her since the second post came in, madam?"

Miss Lucilla acknowledged that she had not.

"Well, ma'am, I have," said the doctor; "and as I saw an open letter on the bed, I took the liberty of asking my little friend if it was from Miss Gordon, and thus learned that it was from that young lady's mother, begging her to fix a day for going to stay with them at Ashford. The best day that she can fix is the day before Frank's return here, and she had better stay there until he has gone back to his regiment. That is my advice to you as her doctor. And now I am going to give her father the same advice, though I shall not tell him as plainly as I tell you the reasons that have prompted me to give it. Hope is a girl of a highly nervous temperament: I had no idea myself until yesterday how nervous. We must not submit her again to any such scenes as caused her attack yesterday."

"It might have been as well to have foreseen this," Miss Lucilla could not refrain from saying.

"It might, indeed," replied the doctor; "in fact it would have been very much better; but since, through my folly, it was not foreseen, the only thing to be done is to make the best of a bad business. We'll keep her here whilst Frank is away, and we'll send her to Ashford before he returns."

"Ashford is a horrid place," said Miss Lucilla.

"Yes, I know," said the doctor; "there's no scenery there, nothing but smoke and smells; but there's nothing unhealthy either in one or the other. She won't go for the sake of the place, but to be away from here, and it will do her a world of good—you'll see if it won't."

Miss Lucilla was on the point of saying that perhaps Dr. Andrewes' prognostics concerning Hope's visit to Ashford might not prove more correct than some of his former ones had been; but before she could say so the doctor was gone, and was sitting beside his old friend in the library, using the strong influence he possessed to convince him of the advantage it would be to Hope to pay this visit to Ashford and make acquaintance with her friend's family, and especially with her friend's mother.

"The child seems like my own," he said that evening to his wife. "I keep thinking and thinking what will be best for her. It was just the same when she went to France. Well, Miss Lucilla got the better of me there; and so I dare say she will now, if she sets her face against her going into Staffordshire, for she has the advantage over me in being always at hand to turn her brother which way she chooses. But I don't think she will try to prevent this, and I must get the child out of Frank's way if I can. I feel that I have brought her into this trouble—not that I had the faintest idea of it beforehand, and the least I can do is to bring her out of it."

Thus spoke Dr. Andrewes to his gentle little wife, whilst at the same moment Hope was sitting down to her desk to

accept Mrs. Gordon's invitation to St. Barnabas' Vicarage, having been informed by her aunt Lucilla that it was her father's wish as well as her own that she should go to Ashford in about a fortnight's time—that was to say, when Frank would be returning from his visit.

"It's bad enough for Frank to make scenes in the house," Miss Lucilla had added—Dr. Andrewes would have said quite unnecessarily; "but we can't have the additional disgrace of your being brought into them. You ought never to have been allowed to have been here with him. However, he's going away to-morrow, and you will have gone to Ashford before he returns, and I hope you will never be at home together again."

Hope wrote her letter to Mrs. Gordon with a very sick heart. She read it over, and it seemed so stiff and cold that she tore it up and wrote another. That seemed colder still; but as she was sitting with it in her hand, her aunt's sharp voice inquired "how many more notes she meant to tear up," adding that "she should have imagined that she had been long enough at Mademoiselle Mallerie's to have learned how to answer a simple letter of invitation," and that "Ben would be coming for the letters in a few minutes." Hope made no reply, but put her note into an envelope and addressed it to Mrs. Gordon, St. Barnabas' Vicarage, Ashford. And then she asked if she might go to bed. She looked so very pale that her aunt, remembering how really ill she had been on the previous day, gave her leave, with a faint pang of self-reproach at having spoken so sharply to her.

The request about Margery had been granted, and the little maid followed Hope into her room almost immediately after she entered it. She too was struck with the paleness of her young mistress's cheeks and the dull look in her eyes, and attributed it, as Miss Savile had done, to yesterday's illness.

"You must get to bed quickly, Miss Hope," she said, "you are fairly worn out; they've let you do too much to-day—going out with master, and sitting up all the evening writing. Ben said you *did* look bad when he went in for the letters."

Sympathy has a marvellous effect in cheering the spirit, and Hope's smile was bright as she replied, "I had not been writing long, Margery, and I don't think it's because I'm tired that I feel so low to-night."

Margery made no reply. It was not for her to inquire into the cause of her young mistress's evident depression. But her manner was so full of respectful sympathy, that Hope's heart, very much over-loaded as it was at that moment, yielded to the influence of it.

"It's not over-fatigue, Margery," she said; "but I have had such a great disappointment to-day."

"Indeed, Miss Hope. I am very, very sorry."

That was all Margery could venture to say; but the tone showed how very real the sorrow was.

"I had set my heart on something I longed to do here, Margery," Hope continued, "and now I am going away."

"Going away, Miss Hope?"

"Only to Ashford, Margery, and only for a fortnight; but my going quite—*quite* prevents my doing what I wanted so much to do, so very, very much."

And such an earnest far-away look came into Hope's expressive eyes as she uttered these last words that Margery was struck by it. An instant after, and they overflowed with tears. Margery saw that whatever had been the desire of Hope's heart which had been taken from her, it could not have been of a trifling nature. All she could say, however, was to repeat her former words—"I'm so sorry, Miss Hope."

Hope said no more then, but took the chair which Margery had set for her, and consented to the hair-brushing for

which she had made her preparations. Those golden masses had not been gathered into any other hand than her own since Elsie had brushed them out on the last morning of the friends being together at Beaumanoir. Perhaps some sweet association connected with this fact, some gentle memory brought to her mind by the mere touch of another hand on the glossy waves of her golden hair, may have helped to make her long more than usual that night for a little of that human sympathy which is such a heart-want with us all; or perhaps the remembrance of what Margery must herself have often experienced with regard to the lover who "was very gay" and "who was not steady," and the knowledge of what Ebenezer Brown had once been and of what he now was, led to the feeling; but certain it was that Hope felt greatly led to speak more openly to Margery to-night than it was her wont to speak to any one, frank and friendly as she always seemed in her intercourse with everybody.

"Margery," she said at last, "I think you must know a good deal about the power of prayer."

"I beg your pardon, miss?" said Margery, not quite perceiving the drift of Hope's remark.

"I mean in your own experience, Margery; you must often have been led to pray very earnestly, for you have had so much trouble in your life—in your mother's illness, and——"

She did not like to touch upon the sorer troubles, but as she hesitated, Margery concluded the sentence for her.

"And about father, and when I was so sorely tempted to go against mother's last wishes; for indeed, Miss Hope, that was the worst trouble of all."

"Yes," said Hope, "I am sure you must have prayed a great deal in these terrible troubles."

"Prayed! Miss Hope; oh yes, indeed I did pray. What

should I have done if I had not prayed, though I did not know as much about prayer then as I do now : if I had, I should not have been as troubled in my mind as I used to be, about praying so much and getting no answer to my prayers. For you see, miss, none of my trials were ever taken from me, though I used to pray, pray, pray. Mother's long illness ended in her death ; and father—oh how mother used to pray for him, and so did I, but he went from bad to worse, until he died—oh ! such a sad death, Miss Hope ; I never can bear to think of it."

"Then don't talk of it, Margery."

"Yes, Miss Hope, I'd rather tell you. You're so good and kind, it does me good to think you know about my troubles, for they really were very heavy for years. Father was well to do when mother married ; he was a guard on the line, and had high wages ; and oh, miss, he was so much trusted and respected until he took to drinking. He used to say it was the cold at night that first led him to it. Oh, Miss Hope, you don't know how often I've heard him wish that he had never touched it, that he had taken coffee instead—as he might have done, as many of his comrades did. It lost him his situation. He made a mistake one night on the line, and was degraded. After that he served as porter for some time on another line, and then he lost that place too—all through the drink, Miss Hope, all through the drink."

Margery paused, remembered that she had wandered from the point, and came back to it.

"Yet all that time mother was praying."

"And God did not answer her prayers, Margery ?"

"Well, Miss Hope, no—at least not as she desired. But mother always said she knew the prayers were not lost. 'God knows,' she would say to me often, 'God knows, Margery. He has told us to pray ; we must obey Him. He has pro-

mised to answer our prayers ; we must believe Him. It's for us to obey and believe : the rest must be left to Him.' I've felt many times since then that mother was right. She was a real, true Christian, Miss Hope, was mother, full of faith and love ; they never failed her, though they were tried very hard."

"They must have been, indeed," said Hope.

She did not say any more, nor did Margery ; but when the hair-brushing was over, and her maid had wished her good-night, she hastened to ease an over-full heart by kneeling at the feet of her Saviour, and praying Him in His mercy and power to save Frank.

"I had longed to be allowed to help in this work," she cried ; "but if it must not be, if I must go away from him, instead of staying here and trying to be of use to him, still let him be saved by some means, O my God, for Thy mercy's sake."

For that afternoon, when she had accompanied her father for his drive in his wheel-chair, he had been so overpowered with drowsiness that Hope's attempts to rouse him had entirely failed. And this had led to her having a conversation with Ben, the first she had ever had, beyond a few kind words on her part and a few very respectful ones on his ; for, as we have already heard from Margery, Ebenezer Brown had the greatest admiration for his young mistress and her sweet pleasant words and ways.

This afternoon, however, Hope had led him to tell her of Wallingford, of the changes that had taken place there since her grandfather's death—changes wrought by the increasing population so far as the things of this world were concerned, but as regarded religion, wrought by the means of one earnest-minded, devoted clergyman.

"He did it all, miss," Ben had said, his honest eyes glowing with enthusiasm. "He got up a Lads' Institute for

us boys, such a lot as we were, and I the worst of them all. And yet, miss, he would have been glad if there had been more like me, because I was just sick of the life I was leading; and it's when one gets sick of a thing that there's most hope of one's being led to turn from it."

And then he told her how the curate had given him no rest until he *had* turned from it; until at length, from having fought in God's strength against one sin, until he had freed himself from the bondage in which it had kept him, he had learned to fight against all sin, as hateful in the sight of the Master, whose soldier and servant he had become.

Hope had returned home with one desire in her heart prevailing over every other, the desire of Frank's reformation. What God had done for Ebenezer Brown—done too, the lad believed, in answer to his mother's prayers, God could do again for poor Frank in answer to hers. She would pray, and hope, and work. With this desire in her heart, and this resolution in her mind, she was told that Frank was going away on a visit next day, and that before he returned, she was to be at Ashford, to remain there until he had gone back to his regiment, perhaps to have his commission in it cancelled before many months were over for drinking and for debt.

Still, when Margery left her mistress that evening the little maid's words remained with her. What was a duty for Margery's mother was equally a duty for her. She too must obey and believe. So, kneeling before her God, she prayed, and asked for faith to believe.

CHAPTER XX.

A FORTNIGHT later, and Hope was on her way to Ashford. That last fortnight at Westbourne had been as quiet a time as Dr. Andrewes could have desired. With Frank away, and Hope at home to attend to her father, Miss Lucilla felt herself at liberty to return to the small excitements which formed the chief pleasure of her purposeless existence. She did not invite friends to the house, indeed ; Mr. Savile's health was in too delicate a state, and Hope was too young to render it at all desirable for her to be brought forward ; but she returned to her whist-parties, and to her drives and promenades on the Beacon, and so much enjoyed the greater freedom which Hope's presence at Marylands gave her, that she was by no means anxious for her return to Beaumanoir, though still fully expecting that she would return. By Dr. Andrewes' advice, Hope had said nothing of her wish to stay with her father to any one but himself. But every day this wish became stronger in her mind. Sorry as she had been to see Frank go away, she could not but perceive with thankfulness the immediate benefit which his absence produced. Mr. Savile, relieved from the constant nervous dread which his son's presence created, and soothed and cheered constantly by his daughter's ministrations, had recovered his strength to such a degree, that on the day before she was to go to Ashford he went out for his first drive in the pony-carriage ; Ben driving the pretty cream

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ponies, whilst Hope sat behind her father, leaning forward to chat constantly, with her little hand on his shoulder, until he forgot all feelings of nervousness in the pleasure of being with her, and under the invigorating influence both of the fresh air and her sweet sympathy.

It was hard to have to leave him, just when she was realising that greatest of all earthly delights in feeling herself really necessary to him ; but the arrangement was made, and Dr. Andrewes would not hear of its being broken. He even said that her going away for a little while would be an advantage in enabling him (the doctor) to judge how far it had been the effect of her presence that had led to the improvement in her father's health, a question which he would like to have definitely settled before giving his opinion about her return to Beaumanoir. Dr. Andrewes did not know how much a higher wisdom and a stronger will than his own had to do with this resolution of his to send Hope to Ashford, nor what very much greater results were to come of it than the avoiding of Frank's society, or the assistance it would afford him in judging of the desirableness of Hope's remaining permanently with her father.

So Hope went to Ashford. Miss Lucilla Savile had designated it as a horrid place. Hope did not think it so by any means. To her it was full of interest—a very different kind of interest, certainly, from that which had been aroused in her mind by the hanging forests and the bowery lanes, the mossy woods and the green valleys of Beaumanoir, or the ivy-wreathed ruins, arched gateways, and old churches of Francheville, but quite as deep.

No escort could be found for her journey to Ashford on the day fixed for her departure ; so the doctor—always so determined, Miss Lucilla said—being resolved that it should not be delayed, took her himself to London, and placed her under the charge of the guard.

By his precaution she had a carriage to herself, so that she enjoyed a very undisturbed sight of the approach to the large town where lay her friend's home, and it made a great impression upon her. At first, as she leant forward to catch a sight of the place of which she had heard so much from Elsie, she could perceive nothing save a dense smoky mist. Then, as the train drew nearer, tall forms emerged, rising, as it seemed to her, straight out of a black sea. A still nearer approach showed these forms to be chimneys, and the sea from which they emerged, not one of water, black as ink, but of roofs of houses.

And then they came upon the river—such a river! not like the silvery stream at Beaumanoir gliding peacefully on, its waters meeting with no stronger opposition than that afforded by ragged roots or pebbly stones, but a broad murky river laden with steam-tugs, continually passing each other as they plied their busy way to and fro, bearing their freights of coals and wood and chemicals.

Hope's interest in Ashford had been aroused into full action before the train stopped, and, for the third time within the last few months, she was greeted at the station by a young man, Arthur Gordon, as she knew instantly from his photograph, though she had not expected him to meet her, or indeed to have made acquaintance with him during her visit to Ashford, for Elsie had mentioned his being still at his hospital when she had last written.

Something in the mere fact of a tall young man coming forward to greet her recalled to her memory those two last meetings—with Victor Raymond at the Francheville station, and with Frank at Westbourne.

How unlike Arthur Gordon was to either.


Victor Raymond and Frank Savile were both of them such handsome fellows; the former a type of southern beauty, with his large dark eyes and regular features, clear

olive complexion, and well-knit, but slight figure ; the latter an equally correct type of Saxon beauty, with large blue eyes, fair hair clustering in curls all over his forehead, straight nose, well-shaped mouth, and pink and white complexion, that was only of late beginning to lose its clearness.

No one, not even the devoted Elsie, could have called Arthur handsome. His features were not sufficiently regular to give him any claim to beauty, and yet there was something in his face which was better than beauty; something which perhaps, by that law of compensation which one so often observes balancing the gifts of nature, is frequently found lacking in faces of great regularity of feature—a most remarkable power of expression. His face was full of purpose. No one could look at it intently without feeling convinced that Arthur Gordon, though still so young a man, had already learned to rule—himself and his own life certainly, and, in all probability, other characters and other lives also. If he had not yet found opportunity of doing so, there was that in his countenance which told plainly that when the opportunity arose the power would not be wanting. The expression of his face was singularly bright and pleasant, however, in spite of the resoluteness which was so strongly marked in it. Hope had never seen a more pleasant smile than that which greeted her as he came to the door of the carriage the instant the train stopped, or heard a pleasanter voice than that with which he made the usual inquiry, “what luggage she had.”

As they went together in search of it, Hope remarked on the promptitude with which he had recognized her, or rather, we should say discovered her, for they had never met before.

Victor Raymond would have been ready with the delicate compliment which such a speech afforded so good an opportunity of offering. But Arthur Gordon was not given to



compliments. I doubt whether he could have framed his lips to utter one had any suggested itself to his mind. "You forget," he said, "or perhaps you do not know, that my sister Elsie has made every member of our family perfectly acquainted with you. Your photograph is to be found in every corner of her room."

He might have added that for months these photographs had given him his ideal of perfect beauty, so much so that he had begged one of them of Elsie, and had kept it in his own room, as the very prettiest picture of a perfectly lovely girl that he had ever seen. But so little had he connected this picture in his mind with Hope herself, that it had been only that morning that by his mother's wish he had removed the picture from the table where it had always stood, and placed it in the drawer.

"Elsie's little friend might chance to see it here," Mrs. Gordon had said; "and it would not be kind thus to suggest to her mind the idea that her likeness was serving merely as a lovely picture."

"No, of course not," said Arthur, and thought no more about either the picture or the original.

"My young sisters are longing to see you," resumed Arthur, as, the luggage found and placed on the cab, the order was given to drive to St. Barnabas' Vicarage.

"I hope Elsie has not been telling them all sorts of things about me that are not a bit true," said Hope; "it will have been very unkind of her." And she laughed one of her little thrilling laughs that had so much real mirth in them, though in this one there was a mingling also of nervous shyness.

Arthur observed both the mirth and the nervousness. Indeed there was not much that he did not observe. Only the evening before his father and mother, talking together of this dear eldest son, who had arrived unexpectedly to consult them about an appointment for which he desired to become

a candidate, had commented upon his peculiar insight into character. His father considered that such singular discernment was the result of his powers of silent observation and reflection, for from a child he had been more given to thinking than to talking, and had liked to trace every result to its cause, every action to its motive, every word almost to the feeling that prompted it; but his mother declared it to be the result of his powers of sympathy, combined with a very rare amount of that knowledge which is the hardest of all to learn, and which so rarely comes to the young—the knowledge of himself and the workings of his own heart.

Both father and mother were right in their conclusions, but his mother even more than his father. Sympathy was Arthur Gordon's chief characteristic. It was Elsie's also, and it was the great bond of union between the brother and sister. But Elsie's sympathy was a principle; Arthur's was an impulse. Elsie's great desire to do right, to be good—above all to be like her Master Jesus, to have the mind in her that had been in Him, to serve as He had served, to minister as He had ministered, would have led her to almost any sacrifice. Her Master's smile, His approving word spoken low and soft in her heart, would have been reward enough for any amount of self-denial.

But Arthur's sympathy was different. We cannot tell—for these children had been brought up so completely in the Master's sight, they had learned so much of Him, of His character of love and His works of mercy from their earliest babyhood, that it is difficult to say—but we can imagine that even had Arthur Gordon not been the Christian man that he was, and that he had been for many years, he would still have been the most helpful, loving-hearted, generous-minded, open-handed of men, going out of his way to do a service to his fellow-man,

especially if that fellow-man happened to be one weaker, poorer, more ignorant than himself. We need only imagine the graces which the love of Christ gives, added to such a nature to form an idea of Arthur Gordon's character. Perhaps it had never been more well described than by his own old nurse, who had lived with his mother ever since her marriage, as faithful servants are wont to do with mistresses worthy of them, and who had said to her of him only that morning, after telling her of some poor woman to whom he had been ministering in body and mind on that very first day of his arrival—

“But was there ever any one in the world like our Master Arthur? Why, ma'am, it's been his way ever since I've known him to have eyes and ears and hands for every one's trials except his own. Even as a little fellow in the nursery, he would be ready to cry for the other children's troubles, and had never a tear for himself.”

Meanwhile, the two young sisters of whom Arthur had spoken as longing to see Hope—the only girls in the family besides Elsie, for the younger children were all boys—had been indulging in a fresh inspection of the large coloured photograph of Hope, which hung framed over Elsie's dressing-table, her last birthday present from her friend before they went to France, and a smaller copy of the picture of which Mary Raymond heard from Mademoiselle Mallerie as being a most lovely picture. The two girls, standing now before it examining it with the fresh interest inspired by the feeling that they were so soon to see the original, decided together that they should certainly be “a little” disappointed.

“Artists always do flatter a little,” said Lucy, “and I don't believe she can be *quite* as lovely as that.”

And Gertrude once more carefully examined the portrait, every feature of which she knew by heart—the large eyes, so gloriously dark and bright, and yet so exquisitely soft in

their expression ; the small, straight nose, with its graceful outline and delicate nostrils ; the low, well-shaped forehead, low only because the waves of golden hair clustered so thickly on the arched head above it ; the perfect mouth, with its slightly-parted rosy lips ; the small oval face, with its rounded, dimpled chin, and cheeks as lovely in their soft roundness as in the bloom that lay upon them. There was no defect that they could see in the picture, but this was doubtless due to the skill of the artist in exaggerating the great beauties, and skilfully concealing the slight defects of such a very pretty face as to make of it a perfectly beautiful picture.

As the girls came to this conclusion concerning the oft-discussed and much-admired likeness of Hope Savile, Arthur Gordon, conversing with the original, had arrived at an exactly opposite one. Her picture, he said to himself, was not the least flattered, not even in that one point which he had sometimes imagined might be the reflection of the gifted artist's own mind, rather than that of the young girl he was painting. In Arthur's opinion the chief charm of that lovely picture was not the beauty of feature, but the marvellous power of expression in the face. Before the quarter of an hour was over which it had taken to drive from the railway-station to St. Barnabas' Vicarage, Arthur Gordon realised, with his instinctive discernment, that the artist, far from exaggerating, had failed, as every artist must fail when the reality exists, *fully* to depict both the power of mind and the intensity of feeling that were so clearly revealed in the truthfulness and intelligence of Hope Savile's eyes, in the perfect candour and simplicity of her manner, in the soft tones of her voice, and in the childish mirthfulness of her clear, silvery laugh. And she was but a girl yet, scarcely more than a child. What a woman she would become ! Arthur was dwelling on this latter thought when the cab


concluded, what seemed to Hope, its long progress through miles of dark, dingy streets ; and rattling over the stones of one of cleaner and more pleasant appearance, stopped at the door of a high, square house, distinguished from the other houses in the same street by the fact that it stood in a stone court, with an iron railing in front—a most uninteresting-looking house, the very opposite of every ideal Hope had ever formed to herself of a vicarage home.

But no sooner had the door opened, and the larger portion of the Gordon family with Mr. and Mrs. Gordon at their head, come out to meet her, than Hope forgot all about the dreariness and want of picturesqueness of the outside in the warmth and pleasantness of the inside. She had no time to observe that the floor-cloth in the hall was shabby with the wear of many feet for many years. Indeed, the space was so well filled with bright, friendly faces, that there was no room left for observing anything ; nor did she remark on that first afternoon, that the parlour into which she was taken was shabby too, as regarded paint, paper, and furniture. Where means were small and numbers large, and where so much was done for others, there was but little money left to spend on adornments and luxuries ; and yet the first impression that the sitting-room into which she was taken made upon her was that of exceeding comfort, and even elegance ; nor was that impression ever effaced by any after-acquaintance with the fadedness of the curtains and chintz covers, which had been washed so often that the once deep crimson flowers had assumed a hue of the palest pink, or with the shabbiness of the carpet, into which Elsie's fingers had helped her mother's to work many a skein of worsted in patching up the worn places.

Carpets and chintzes, paint and paper, fine furniture and elegant adornment, are not the elements of a home. These elements are love, peace, freedom, rest ; and for the first

time in her life Hope, finding these in all perfection in St. Barnabas' Vicarage, realised what a home really was. Life at Beaumanoir was very happy and pleasant; she had often called it her second home, as she used to call the old lodgings in Wilton Crescent, and even her grandfather's house at Wallingford, home. But how many of the chief elements of home had been wanting in all these. None were wanting at St. Barnabas' Vicarage, from the chief of all, the father himself—calm yet cheerful, tender yet firm, considerate, patient, brave, kind, making clear to his children by his own character and his daily conduct the idea of the other and yet greater Father in heaven, who was also his Father, and in obeying and loving Whom he had become what he was—from such a father as this, down to the baby in arms in the nursery, not one.

Hope had often said to Elsie that she envied her all her early advantages of home training, but until now she had never in the least realised how great these advantages were. That first day's experience opened her eyes fully to their value.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE outside of St. Barnabas' Vicarage might be dingy and dreary. All its surroundings might be equally so. There was not a green lane or a pleasant meadow within walking distance, the girls said ; but who need make themselves unhappy about these things when within all was so bright. Yet what made all so bright ? Hope asked herself that question before she had been an hour in the house, and a glance around answered her in one word—love. The very atmosphere was one of love. All was homely to a degree, but in its homeliness, at least in Hope's eyes, lay half its charm. There was not one room in all the house which was not made lovable by daily use and the sweet associations which daily use brings with it.

"You see we have no drawing-room," Mrs. Gordon had said to her on that first evening, when, after a rest in her own room which Hope had been somewhat unwillingly made to take, and a very pleasant meal in the well-worn dining-room, which was neither dinner nor tea, but a comfortable union of both, the family returned to the large sitting-room into which she had been ushered on her first arrival, and prepared to take up what were evidently the usual evening occupations.

"Is not this your drawing-room ?" said Hope, for she had been thinking what a very pleasant one it was, comparing it in her mind with that at Marylands.

"Do you think it's like one?" asked Gertrude, who had just returned from staying with an aunt, whose grand drawing-room had put her rather out of conceit with her own.

Hope's native truthfulness obliged her say—

"Well, perhaps it's not exactly like most drawing-rooms, because," she added, with the musical laugh which her new friends had already begun to appreciate, "it's so very much more comfortable."

Arthur Gordon looked up from a bundle of papers with which he was busying himself at what was considered "father's table," which stood in the recess on one side of the fireplace, answering to the recess on the other, which was sacred to "mother's chair" and the work-table which stood beside it, and answered Hope's laugh with another. Arthur's laughs were also characteristic in their nature, so full of real amusement, and yet, like all else about him, so quiet.

"And drawing-rooms in general are so very uncomfortable," he added. "I quite agree with you."

"Aunt Emma's drawing-room is beautiful," said Gertrude; "such lovely chairs and sofas, and such handsome ornaments and pictures."

The description corresponded with aunt Lucilla's drawing-room at Marylands, and Hope said—

"Do they always live in it?"

"Who do you mean by 'they'?" asked Gertrude.

"Your aunt's family; do they use their room as you do yours?"

"Aunt Emma has no family," said Gertrude; "she is not married."

"Happily," interrupted Tom, the eldest of the school-boys; "for if she were what would become of the drawing-room, or rather what would become of the family? For I suppose they would be the ones to give way."

But Mrs. Gordon interrupted with the gentle check which never seemed like a reproof.

"Hush, hush!" she said. "You can't tell what aunt Emma would do if she had a family; but anyhow she has a right to do as she likes with her own house. You can't expect her to disarrange all her arrangements for her nieces and nephews when they pay her occasional visits of a few days. Besides, you see, Gertrude greatly admires the handsome drawing-room."

"Oh, Gertie likes everything that is grand," replied Tom, and he proceeded to make some remark about his having had to write his letter home in his cold bedroom, because his aunt was afraid he would spill the ink on the drawing-room writing-table, which his mother did not seem to hear, as she went on to say—

"Do you know, Tom, I should not object at all to a drawing-room such as Gertrude admires, if it were in accordance with my means, and if we had a house large enough to allow of a drawing-room kept for company, and a sitting-room for the daily uses of life. But since neither the size of our house nor the size of our purse allows of our having more than one sitting-room, you see, we prefer making ourselves really comfortable to trying to keep up anything like style. To-morrow I must take Hope all over our house, and then she will see what a well-filled nest it is. Even if we desired to shut ourselves out from some of the rooms in order to open them in style on certain gala days, or to admit strangers into the enjoyment of their grandeur for a few days or weeks during the year, we should have no opportunity of doing so."

And after this little discussion there was music and singing, and some very pleasant reading aloud, for at the Vicarage even the after-tea recreations had their appointed order. This was necessary, Mrs. Gordon said truly, for in so large

a family as theirs, if every one went their own way, with so many interests and occupations as fell to every one's share, no common meeting-place would be found for that mutual enjoyment which is such a strong bond of family union.

So Lucy went to open the piano as a matter of course after tea, and they played and sang together. The music was not of such a high order as to afford in itself any very great enjoyment to so cultivated a musician as Hope, and when she herself took her place at the piano, and both played and sang, the girls were disposed to be distressed at having exhibited their inferior attainments before her; but here, again, a few kind words from the mother showed them that this was foolish, since but little would be accomplished in life, and a great part of its pleasure would be taken from it, if nobody did anything in the presence of those who could do it better than themselves.

Arthur Gordon was the only one who sang well. He had a rich bass voice which only wanted cultivation to make it very fine. The children made him sing popular songs for Hope's express benefit, and he sang first "Nancy Lee," and then "John Peel" and "Tom Bowling." Every word and note was familiar to the young Gordons. They had heard them over and over again at club entertainments and penny readings; but Hope, whose experience of life was very limited, had never heard any one of them before. They added another very strong impression to the many which her mind had already received that day. Arthur's singing possessed the great charm of being perfectly articulate. Every word was distinctly heard, and the words suited the rich, strong tones of his voice, and even seemed to suit *him* personally, or at least so Hope thought. Gertrude played his accompaniments, and, as he stood beside her, with his tall, strongly-developed figure, his calm, resolute face, his keen, clear

eyes, and his firm, well-shaped mouth, round which played such an expression not only of determination, but also of benevolence and of fun, Hope thought that he was just the man who could sing with fitting feeling and true sympathy of such other men as "John Peel" and "Tom Bowling," and the loyal, true-hearted husband of "Nancy Lee."

The singing was interrupted by the mother's remark that she was sorry to disturb them, but if she was to get the help which the girls had promised in finishing little Mervyn's suit, and if they were to hear the end of the book in which they were so much interested before it went back to the library, they really must begin reading. "Father had said they might call him at eight o'clock, and it was already past."

So the table was made ready for that pleasant hour's reading which went on every evening, when there was not any service, or night school, or choir practice, which was only three evenings out of six, for a clergyman's family has to think of the interests and pleasures of very many besides themselves. So full of occupation was the life at St. Barnabas' Vicarage that the Gordons rejoiced that Hope's arrival should have been fixed for the one day in all the week which was the most free of parish interests. Never throughout her whole future life did she forget the impression made upon her by the holy beauty of that happy family life.

Nor was the impression Hope made on the Gordons less pleasant than that made by the Gordons upon her. No sooner had Gertrude carried her off to her room—Elsie's bedroom, always given to visitors during her absence as being the most elegantly fitted up in the house, thanks entirely to Hope's own many presents—than one and all joined in praise of her; not only of her appearance nor,

indeed, chiefly, though they spoke in warm terms even of that, and in still warmer of her sweet manners, her bright intelligence, and the ready interest she took in everything she saw and heard. Arthur said less than any one, but it was never Arthur's way to say much.

Next day Mrs. Gordon took Hope all over the house—in every corner of which she was interested for Elsie's sake—even into that “sanctum sanctorum,” as the children considered the vicar's study. I doubt if even Mrs. Gordon would at that hour of the day have herself ventured into it uninvited—for many were the visitors who found their way there, and of very diverse characters ; but the vicar, hearing her pass his door with Hope, and knowing that they were on the surveying tour of which he had heard speak at breakfast, opened it, and begged that his room might be included in the inspection. Hope was greatly surprised at its appearance ; and when the vicar inquired, with a smile into the cause of the surprise, she answered, with her usual honesty, “It's such a pretty room.”

“And you did not expect a hard-worked vicar in a dirty town to have a pretty study? Well, I have to thank my wife and daughters for giving me mine. Mrs. Gordon fitted it up with her own hands thirty years ago ; and last year, finding that it had grown to look shabby, she and her three girls succeeded in getting me away for a fortnight's holiday, and doing it up in the style you see.”

“Not a very difficult or expensive matter, either,” said Mrs. Gordon ; “it did not cost much time or money.”

Which was true, for the renovation consisted in new curtains and chintz chair coverings, the work of her own and her daughter's hands, and in the fresh red baize coverings of the bookshelves in the two recesses on either side of the fireplace, which made them bright to look on, even though filled with such *very* dingy books ; whilst on these

shelves stood plaster-of-paris statues, almost all of sacred subjects, and around the room hung pretty chromo-lithographs; and in one window—a bay window with a south aspect—was a stand of flowers. Mrs. Andrewes might boast of rarer ones and more numerous, but of none more carefully tended.

“Ah! that is my wife’s work,” said Mr Gordon, as Hope stood before the stand in wondering admiration. “She attends daily to these: is it not good of her in the midst of all she has to do? She knows that these quiet companions, making no noise, yet smiling at me all day, cheer me in my work more than anything else could do.”

“And cheer others too,” said Mrs. Gordon, as she and Hope left the room together. “Many have spoken to me of the effect which that bright, cheerful study of the vicar’s has had upon them. And for himself, whose work lies amidst so much that is gloomy and depressing, I feel it is of the greatest importance that his surroundings should be made as cheerful and bright as possible. He would never make them so for himself, no man ever does, so his woman-kind must do it for him.”

“I think you try to make all the surroundings of your home bright and cheerful,” said Hope.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Gordon; “it is the great object of my life, especially for my husband and the children. I have always felt that we must do battle here with the circumstances of smoke and sorrow and sin that surround our home outside. People who live in pleasant country places know nothing of the efforts which we townspeople, and people of *such* a town, have to make, in order to create and maintain that cheerful, bright atmosphere in a home which has so much influence on health and temper, and consequently on happiness. We have no birds singing in green trees, no flowers growing in gardens, no sunshine streaming

into our windows to gladden our ears and eyes and hearts, so we must cherish home songsters and home flowers. I depend more on birds and flowers and pictures and statuettes in helping me to educate my children than I do on any other merely external helps."

And therefore it was that all through the house such things were to be found; flowers, indeed, only in the "sitting-room" and in the vicar's study, for flowers were expensive; but canaries sang in the nursery, and bright pictures adorned the walls, and even there might pretty statuary be seen, bought, it was true, for a few pence from the dark-eyed Italian who always carried his freshly-filled tray of plaster images first to St. Barnabas' Vicarage, knowing that some little Samuel or Timothy, or some angel or cherub, would very likely find a purchaser there. And perhaps the children themselves who purchased these cheap luxuries, or for whom they were purchased, never knew how many pure and pleasant and poetic ideas were first suggested to their minds by the sacred figures, the angel-heads, and the cherub forms which stood about their rooms on equally inexpensive brackets well out of reach of romping limbs or meddlesome fingers, but within sight of eyes and minds. The whole of the ornaments and luxuries at St. Barnabas' Vicarage would not have fetched at a sale one-half of the sum which Miss Lucilla had persuaded her brother to give for the pair of huge bronze candelabra which stood in the hall at Marylands.

Hope returned from that short hour's pleasant "going over the house" with Mrs. Gordon, impressed with the idea that money, so far from being, as her aunt Lucilla would have said, the "sinews of furnishing," was only one, and that by no means a chief means, taking its place far below taste and thought and order. "If ever she had a house of her own," Hope said to herself, "she would remember

Mrs. Gordon's, and take it as her model. If such a delightful home could be created in the midst of such adverse circumstances as smoke and fog, what would not a home be, created on the same principles, and yet further beautified by light and sunshine and fresh air?"

CHAPTER XXII.

ON the third morning after her arrival at St. Barnabas' Vicarage, Hope was sitting in the pleasant sitting-room, busily engaged in writing a long account of her many delightful impressions of Elsie's home and Elsie's relations, and especially of Elsie's father and mother, to Elsie herself, entering into all those minute details which girls love to write, and other girls love equally to read, when Mrs. Gordon entered the room in her cloak and bonnet.

"Going out, mother?" asked Gertrude, looking up from the music she was busy copying, whilst Lucy stopped her sewing-machine to listen to the answer to Gertrude's inquiry. It was such an unusual thing for mother to go out in the morning.

"Yes," said Mrs. Gordon. "I have to go into the parish, but not on any very serious business. One of our Friendly girls is going off by the twelve o'clock train. I have heard of an excellent place for her if she can start at once, which I know can be done, if she and her mother will be energetic enough to manage it. I want to see that they are so, and as it is right down at Piggott's Buildings, I shall take the opportunity of visiting some of the people there. If either of you girls like to come with me, I shall be very glad to have you, only you must be quick."

A walk with mother was always a treat, as was plainly shown by the very sincere tone of regret in which Gertrude

said she had promised her father faithfully to copy the tenor and bass parts of the new hymn for the choir practice, and Lucy regretted the necessity of fulfilling an equally faithful promise to nurse that she would have the seams of Mervyn's new suit ready machined for her by dinner-time.

"Might I go?" asked Hope. "I would not be a minute getting ready, and my letter can easily wait till to-morrow."

And in less than two minutes she had joined Mrs. Gordon in her travelling-hat and jacket, and set out with her for what was actually her very first visit to that enormous class of our fellow brothers and sisters, "the poor."

This was another of Hope's new experiences, and by no means one of the least important. Mrs. Gordon, gathering from her, as they went along their way, how entirely ignorant she was personally of the ways and characters of the poor, determined to choose her visits wisely that day, with the express purpose of making her first impressions what she would wish them to be.

Hope's ideas on this subject, it seemed, were all gathered from Elsie or from her aunt; and these two held opinions utterly at variance with each other. In Miss Lucilla Savile's opinion "the poor" were a thriftless, improvident, ungrateful, insubordinate race, on whom, for the most part, charity was entirely thrown away. In Elsie's opinion "the poor" were our brothers and sisters, the weaker members of the very same human family, for whose sake it was not only our duty, but our delight, as stronger members, children of the same heavenly Father, to deny ourselves and to make sacrifices, which were met on their part with love and gratitude far, far beyond their desert.

That one morning in "the parish" with Mrs. Gordon showed Hope from whom it was that Elsie had learned her ideas, and made her long to become herself a pupil of the same teacher.

"Oh, Mrs. Gordon," she exclaimed, her eyes glistening with sympathetic admiration, as they came out of one room, "how *can* people say, as aunt Lucilla so often does, that there is no good amongst the poor, when there are such poor people as *that* woman!"

"And she one of thousands like her," replied Mrs. Gordon—"thousands who would do the same thing from the same motive."

That woman was a certain Mrs. Bevis, a poor widow just recovering from a severe illness, with scarcely strength enough left to attend to her own household. Several small children were gathering round the table, on which the scantiest of meals was prepared, and amongst them was a tall girl of about fourteen, very unlike the others, as Hope observed even before Mrs. Gordon said,

"You still have Katie with you, I see."

"Yes, ma'am," was the reply. It was only when Mrs. Gordon asked how long "Katie" was likely to remain, that the widow added, in a tone of unmistakable humility, and with the sweetest look on her thin face, "Well, ma'am, I've made up my mind to keep her till something turns up for her. I haven't heard of any place for her yet. I can't let her go back where she came from. God has been very good to me in bringing me out of my bad illness. *You* know how bad I was, ma'am, and that if it had not been for Him raising me up, my poor children would be in the workhouse now."

"Yes," Mrs. Gordon said; "I scarcely thought you would recover at one time."

"Nor should I have recovered, ma'am, but for the Lord's goodness. He's been mighty kind to me, and it seems as though He had just sent Katie in my way to give me an opportunity of being kind to her for His sake. It's so little we can do for Him, poor folk like we—

nothing indeed. But He's so mighty condescending, that He counts what we do for any one poorer than we as done for Him. He says so Himself, don't He?"


"He does indeed," said Mrs. Gordon; "and you do it for Katie from love to Him?"

"Just so, ma'am. And, besides," she added, with yet more reverence, "I feel I know more of my Saviour's love now than I did before my illness, and perhaps I can teach Katie to know something of it too. She goes regular of Sundays to the school yonder, and you can't think what a much better girl she is getting."

"Katie," as Mrs. Gordon explained to Hope after they had left the house, was a poor, neglected, ill-treated child who had run away from the house of a drunken aunt, who had beaten her cruelly when in a state of intoxication, and had taken refuge with Mrs. Bevis. The aunt had made the child's running away an excuse for not wishing to take her back, nor could Mrs. Bevis wish her to return to a home where drink was only one of the sins; so Katie had remained with her, and seemed likely to remain. She would probably give the widow a good deal of trouble, Mrs. Gordon said, for she was an ill-trained child, but she had made up her mind to the trouble if thereby good could come to Katie.

Hope inquired where the "school yonder" might be of which Mrs. Bevis had spoken; and Mrs. Gordon smiled as she replied, "We will go in and see the school, and I will introduce you to another of my special friends, for Mrs. Adams will most likely be getting it ready for to-morrow. It is only a Sunday-school."

And turning into one of the blackest of the small houses, she led the way into a low room, where they found a woman placing benches up and down a kitchen, from which the furniture had been cleared out, as Hope could see, into a small lean-to at the back of the house.



Mrs. Gordon made a few inquiries of the woman about the children, and especially about the new pupil "Katie," and when they had left she said,

"That woman, Hope, offered us the use of her kitchen—a wonderfully large one for this street—that a Sunday-school might be set up in it for the very, very lowest of our children; children who, like Katie, have no clothes but those they have on their backs, and who cannot come even to our ragged-school. Mrs. Adams takes the trouble of clearing her kitchen every Saturday for them, and her husband is willing to let her do so without any other reward than the pleasure of doing a good action. One of the curates comes to teach the children, and when Arthur is at home he sometimes helps him."

"Are there many such people as Mrs. Bevis and Mrs. Adams amongst the lower classes?" asked Hope.

Mrs. Gordon smiled again. "Numbers and numbers; not only in our parish, but in every parish. But you must not speak of the poor as the lower classes, Hope. It requires but little acquaintance with them to show how infinitely higher many of them are to us in many things: in some virtues especially, and those of the highest, gratitude and patience, for instance, we rarely find such examples of these amongst the wealthier classes as are quite common amongst the poor. I wish we had time to pay a few more visits," she continued, "but at all events you must see Mrs. Grant. I always tell the children that they must not allow themselves to have favourites; so I must be true to my own principles, and not confess that Mrs. Grant is a favourite of mine. But she is a wonderful woman, Hope, and I should like you to see her now, for we may not be able to get as far as this again."

And so saying she took Hope through several narrow streets, all so like each other—so black, and poor, and

wretched looking—that Hope thought that it must require a pretty intimate acquaintance with them to be able to distinguish one from another. Yet, when Mrs. Gordon stopped at number 16 in Bedford Street, Hope perceived a difference. To begin with, the knocker was shining with recent rubbing, and the windows were bright and clean, with actually two plants pressing their somewhat dingy-looking flowers up against them, as if vainly reaching after the sunshine which they would not have found outside the house any more than in it. Indeed, the interior was far brighter than the exterior, as Hope realised, when going straight into the room from the street outside, she found herself in the humblest of kitchens—but at the same time, the cleanest and tidiest—where on a bed in the corner lay, or rather sat, a woman, with a thin drawn face of such ashy whiteness as Hope would never have imagined possible in any living being, propped up with a pillow supported by a chair placed behind it.

“I have brought a young lady to see you,” said Mrs. Gordon; “a great friend of Miss Elsie’s.”

“Then may God bless her for Miss Elsie’s sake,” said the poor woman, catching her breath at every word.

“I see it’s a bad day with you,” said Mrs. Gordon, kindly.

What seemed to Hope quite a heavenly expression came into the woman’s face as she replied, “A bad day for my asthma—yes; but not for me. It’s true I’ve not been able to lie down since the day before yesterday, but I’ve had a blessed time of it. My Saviour has been so near me; it almost seemed as though I could see Him and hear Him.”

She paused for breath, and added,

“And oh, ma’am. Joe *is* such a good husband to me. That’s my hardest trouble now to see him doing everything in the house, and not to be able to help one bit. If I only

could work, and save him a little that's got all his own work to do besides, I wouldn't mind suffering more for it afterwards, only you see I can't."

"I don't think your husband ought to have scrubbed the floor," said Mrs. Gordon; "for I am sure it was his strong hands that made it so white—damp is very bad for you."

"It was my fault he did that," replied his wife; "you see, ma'am, I've kept things clean and straight always. When I was taken so bad on Thursday, I thought it was the last attack I should ever have. I'd never been quite so bad before, and I made sure I was going to die this time; and it troubled me to think of people coming in and not finding the place clean after all that Joe does to keep it nice, so he took and scrubbed it just to make me easy in my mind."

As they left the house, a little bird, hanging in a cage over the window, was carolling a loud song, doubtless in sympathy with Mrs. Gordon, who had been reading by the sick woman's bed. Mrs. Gordon called Hope's attention to the little songster, whose cage was kept as clean by "Joe" as was everything else in the place, with fresh sand spread on the floor, and even a bit of sugar between the bars.

"Ever since poor Mrs. Grant became too ill to leave her bed, all through this last winter," she said, "that little bird has been the comfort of her life. And yet, Hope, the other day, that poor creature begged me, with tears in her eyes to accept that little bird as a small token—such a 'tiny token,' she said—of her love and gratitude. I have really done very little for her, Hope, for she lives at too great a distance for me even to see her often, but her grateful heart thinks a great deal of a very little. 'O ma'am,' she said, 'do take it, you've done a deal for us, and we've nothing to give you in return. I should like you to have the canary, and so would Joe; you told him it was a rare beauty, and he'd be pleased to think you had it.' And yet, Hope, in the

face of such instances as these, and thousands like them, one can talk of the ingratitude and want of heart of the poor."

Hope made an inward resolution that she, at all events, would never do so, nor would she ever allow such an assertion to pass uncontradicted by her on the experience of that one morning.

She said so to Mrs. Gordon, who answered, "Then, Hope, you will have learned a great deal in this short experience, and I can promise you from my own, which has been a long one, that further and more intimate acquaintance with the poor will only confirm this newly formed belief in their many virtues. No," she added, warmly, "I do *not* find the poor ungrateful. Instead of having to say in my intercourse with them, 'Well, he might show a little more gratitude,' or, 'Well, she might seem more pleased,' the words that have oftenest come to my mind as expressing their appreciation of help have been those of Job's parable, 'The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me.' The greatness of the blessing always seems to me quite out of proportion to the smallness of the kindness shown them, quite as much out of proportion as God's infinite mercies are to the very, very small amount we can any of us do for Him or for His poor."

The worst part of the town had been left behind them, and they were nearing the Vicarage, when, as they walked along the river side, Mrs. Gordon said, looking at her watch,

"We should have time to go into this house and see another of my friends, Hope, if you are not tired."

"Tired!" said Hope; "I should like to visit all day."

"You would find it very weary work sometimes, Hope, especially as *all* poor people are not like those whom we have seen to-day."

"And it isn't only the women," said Hope; "there are such good men too."

"Joe Grant and Sam Adams are amongst our chief helpers. My husband often says that amidst all our earnest fellow-workers in the parish—and God has been good in giving us a large and loving band—none do such real service as these men and others like them, men who have set their face resolutely to do right, and turned their backs resolutely on what is wrong, and are willing to bear the jeers and scoffs of their mates rather than be disloyal in the least thing to the Master whom they serve."

Mrs. Gordon stopped at the door of the house she was about to enter, and said,

"This woman is one of my heroines, Hope ; and she *is* a Christian heroine. The husband is one of the worst men in Ashford. Her children are a sad source of sorrow to her. The father's example so far has had more effect than the mother's persuasion and prayers. But you will see for yourself what the woman is like."

There was no one, however, in the room into which they went. A woman opened a door opposite, and dropped a curtsey at the sight of Mrs. Gordon, saying in reply to her inquiry,

"Oh, Mrs. Peters is upstairs ; she's not been out of bed to-day !"

"Then she is worse," said Mrs. Gordon ; "I hoped her cough was getting better with this drier weather."

"And so it is, ma'am," said the woman ; "it's been a sight better since the warm weather set in, though there's no doubt the poor creature is far gone in decline, as the doctor says. She'll be as bad as ever again when winter comes ; that is, if she lives to see winter, which I should think is mighty doubtful, considering how things go."

Mrs. Gordon asked no questions, it was not her way ever to ask questions of one person concerning another ; and moreover, this woman was so inveterate a talker that she

always endeavoured to get out of her way as quickly as possible, so she stepped forward to go upstairs, saying as she did so,

“I know she will like to see me.”

“No doubt she will, ma’am,” replied the woman, putting herself directly in the way of the narrow staircase in her determination to have her say; “no doubt she will, though it’s my opinion she don’t mean any one to *see* her to-day. She knows I’m a friend of hers, and would do anything for her—good, patient martyr that she is; but when I took her up some breakfast, she’d got the room *that* dark there was no getting a sight of her. They were a-fighting down here till past two this morning—both father and son as tipsy as they could be—and I know she came in for her share of that man’s cruelty afterwards, as well as if I’d seen what she was determined to hide.”

“Please let me pass,” said Mrs. Gordon; but she had to put her hand on the woman’s shoulder before she would check her talk and stand aside.

A rickety staircase led them to a small bedroom, which had indeed been made so dark by a black shawl pinned across the one window, that it was only by the light admitted through the open door, beside which Hope remained, that she could see Mrs. Gordon make her way to a bed at the further corner.

“I had brought a friend of Miss Elsie’s to see you,” she said, “but we will come again another day. If your head is bad we must not lighten the room.”

“It is very bad, ma’am,” was the quiet answer; “but I’m glad to see you, ma’am, if only to tell you what I know you’ll like to hear. Our Dick is going up to the mission-room this very evening. He’s made up his mind to sign the pledge. He gave me his word this morning when he went to his work that he would do it before ever he came

back. And you know, ma'am, our Dick is one to do what he says. So that I've got a light heart if I've got an aching head, for the Lord has heard one prayer, and it's a promise of His hearing the others."

Not a word of her drunken husband, or of Bill, the eldest boy, who was closely following his father in his evil ways. Such subjects as these were for her own heart and for her God. All she would speak of, even to her best and dearest friend, as she fully recognized Mrs. Gordon to be, was of this hope for her second boy, but never from her lips did even Mrs. Gordon hear what she learned afterwards from Dick himself, that it had been the sight of all he had seen his poor mother suffer that night that had made him vow before God—a vow which he afterwards repeated to her in the morning, sealing it with a rough kiss on her tear-stained and bruised face—that he would goup to the mission-room and sign the pledge that same evening and never touch another drop of liquor.

All the morning the poor mother, having cast on her Saviour those other remembrances which she dared not think of—laying at His feet a burden which it would have driven her mad to carry herself—had lain quietly on her bed, thanking God for the one ray of light which He had sent in the storm and through the storm. The men were not coming home to their dinner, for which she thanked God. When she heard the husband of her loquacious neighbour come in and call for his, she took the opportunity to steal downstairs to make up her fire, and get things ready for supper-time, when her husband and the lads would be returning. After that she would be safe from any kindly visits from her neighbours, for Peters was feared by them all. When he had been drinking, even the men were glad to keep out of his way.


Mrs. Gordon told Hope a good deal about him and his

sweet, patient wife as they returned to St. Barnabas' Vicarage.

"The poor thing is far gone in consumption," she said, "as talkative Mrs. Greene told us, and it is often as much as she can do to keep up. Yet I have never heard a complaint of any kind fall from her lips; and though I am very intimate with her, and she talks quite freely to me of other things, she has never given me to understand that her husband was not the best of husbands."

"Brave, loyal woman," exclaimed Hope, her dark eyes glistening with admiration.

"Yes," said Mrs. Gordon, "that is also a chief virtue among the poor—loyalty. I know another woman, Hope, whom I cannot take you to see, for she lives at the other end of the town, who is quite as loyal as Mrs. Peters. Her husband is a bargeman also, and a terrible drunkard, and she has a large family whom she has no strength to attend to—for she has had two attacks of paralysis, brought on, no doubt, by trouble. It is trying for her husband of course; people often pity him for having such an invalid wife and wretched home, not remembering how much he has had to do himself in bringing on these troubles. He bears them very sadly, drink being his one resource, but she bears them almost as patiently as poor Mrs. Peters. The utmost I ever heard her say was once, when speaking of her little daughter, who had everything to do, she said, 'I do wish Jessie could keep the place straighter, for when her father comes in, and does not find things to his mind, it makes him say things he would not otherwise.' I don't think I know any one as tried as she is, and yet, Hope, she said to me one day, in quite a tone of self-accusation, 'I see others suffer much more than I do, who are much gratefuller than I am.'"



CHAPTER XXIII.

A FEW days afterwards the vivid impressions which Hope's first day's visiting amongst "the poor" had made upon her mind were stamped indelibly upon it by an incident which happened.

She was busy in Mr. Gordon's study, attending to the flowers in the bay window. Looking round, as she had done, for something which it might be within her capabilities to do, to help in a house where all were helping, she had asked Mrs. Gordon if she might "mind the flowers for her during her stay at the vicarage. She had served a loving apprenticeship in flower-tending with her dear Mrs. Andrewes, and felt fully equal to the task."

As, indeed, she proved herself to be, for never had the roses and fuchsias and geraniums looked more bright and beautiful than since Hope's experienced fingers had removed every dead leaf and flower, and turned them to the light, and watered and tended them.

At first she had only taken charge of those in the "sitting-room," but lately she had been, as she considered, promoted to attend to those in the study also; and this she did every morning, whilst the vicar took his usual half-hour's exercise in the plot of ground at the back of the house, which its owners were pleased to call a garden. To-day, however, the heavy rain had prevented this, and he and Mrs. Gordon were arranging some new books on the

crimson-edged shelves, whilst Hope was clipping away at the flowers, when the maid came in to say that Joe Grant had asked her to "take in his respects, and could he have a word of the vicar or Mrs. Gordon."

Hope prepared to leave the room, but Mrs. Gordon said, "Wait a minute, dear, till we hear what he wants. He's the husband of your friend, Mrs. Grant. I should like you to see him. I'm afraid," she added, "his wife must be worse. She had a feeling that she should not get over this attack."

Joe Grant was shown into the study, and the first look at his honest face told them that the wife to whom he had so loyally fulfilled his marriage vow, to love and to cherish, for richer and poorer, in sickness and in health, was not worse, but very much better. No more sitting up in bed all night panting with asthma. No more labouring for the breath that came with such painful difficulty and uncertainty. The poor limbs that were worn so thin—Joe had not known how thin until, with reverent love, he had helped to stretch them out in their still repose—were at rest for ever. The soul that had seemed all through the previous nights to be panting to get rid of the shackles that bound it, had found its freedom. But just at this moment Joe did not realise anything of this. All he felt was that his wife was gone from him. The marks of tears were on his face, though he shed none now that there were others there to see. In his hand he held something tied up in a red cotton handkerchief.

"Yes, she's gone," he said, "and I'm very sorry that I did not see how near her end was until too late last night to send."

"I wish you had sent," said the vicar.

"It was past twelve, sir, before the change came."

"Still I wish you had sent," the vicar repeated. "I do

wish I could make my people feel that it is never too late to send for me ; that my work is to be at their call, at any hour of the day or night when I may be needed."

"Well, sir," said Joe, "I think we know that, but we would not have liked to disturb you, and she was most too ill to speak ; but she did send a word of grateful parting to you and your good lady, with a thousand thanks for all that you had done for her. Which I am sure I would like to give you too, only I don't know how."

The tears were very near getting the better of Joe now, and though he was such a steady man, his strong hands might have been seen to tremble as he untied the red handkerchief, and took from it the cage and the canary. He set it on the table, and at the instant, the bird, freed from its mysterious captivity, burst into a loud clear strain of song. This time the tears got the mastery. Joe had to brush them away with his coat-sleeve, and to choke them down with a resolute effort, before he could say—

"You won't refuse to accept it now, ma'am, will you, for her sake and for mine ? I could not stand the sound of it now, and I could not bear for any one but you to listen to the song that's been a cheer to her dear heart all through the winter."

In vain did Mrs. Gordon assure him that in a little while the canary would prove as great a comfort to him as it had been to her. In vain did the vicar point out that it had preached one lesson of comfort to them already in the sweet song of thanksgiving that it had sent forth when it found itself freed from its bondage. The good man would hear of nothing except that the canary should be accepted for her sake and for his. So the canary was accepted, and Joe went away to his widowed home, the vicar promising to come to him shortly. Both he and Mrs. Gordon shook hands warmly with him, and, shy as she was, Hope could

not resist doing so also. He knew in an instant who she was. His wife had well described the lovely vision that had appeared in her sick room that day.

"People talk of angels' visits," she had said to him on his return from work, "but oh, Joe, I'm sure I've had one to-day. If you could only have seen the young lady that came with Mrs. Gordon—Miss Elsie's friend. I tell you sometimes that as I lie here alone I often think about the angels, and please myself in fancying them, but all my fancyings never came to anything so like an angel as she must surely be. Oh, but I do wish you could see her."

Joe was no flatterer. What plain-spoken English workman is? An honest dislike to compliments was as inherent in his nature as in Arthur Gordon's, but as Hope held out that little hand to him, with the tears filling her dark eyes, he could not help saying, in a tone that came from the depth of his heart—

"My missus wished for me to see you, and I am glad she has had her wish. God bless your pretty face!"

And he left the house by the front door, which the vicar opened for him, and went down the street with the slow, unwilling tread of a man returning to a home where, for the first time since he brought his wife into it, there will be no welcome to meet him.

On the following Sunday, which was to be Hope's last Sunday at Ashford—for her visit, which had been extended from the promised fortnight to three weeks, was drawing to its close now, and her return home was fixed for the following Tuesday—she went, as usual, to St. Barnabas' Church in the evening.

It had been an intensely hot day; so intense had the heat been, indeed, that Mrs. Gordon had positively refused to allow Hope and Gertrude to accompany Arthur to Mrs. Adams' ragged school, much to Hope's disappointment, for

she had taken the greatest interest in the class she had taught there on the previous Sunday. Such a class! No child had a hat; few had a whole dress; some even had no shoes and stockings. Children who possessed such treasures as hats and shoes and whole frocks, however old, were not ashamed to go to the St. Barnabas' ragged school. Mrs. Adams' kitchen had been opened for those who had no clothes fit to show outside their own street, where all alike were dressed in rags, and such a class had Hope taught, without one decent bit of clothing certainly, but with sweet little faces, and pretty curly heads and bright eyes, and, many of them, intelligent little minds, ready to listen to all that was said to them.

Hope's warm heart had gone out to them. She found that none of them could read, few even knew their letters, but she had no difficulty in getting them to learn the first verse of a hymn, and when she began to tell them Bible stories in her peculiarly graphic manner, her own face bright with animation and her voice full of interested sympathy, every little face was turned to her, and every pair of brown or blue eyes fixed on her from the beginning to the end, when more than one little voice was heard to regret that school-time was up, and Arthur overheard the little things saying to each other as they went out, that they "hoped the pretty lady would come again next Sunday, for she told stories fine."

Next Sunday, however, proved much too hot a day for such a long walk, and Hope was sorry, though the disappointment was made up to her later in the afternoon by her being allowed to go with Mrs. Gordon to her boys' Bible class, which was held in a room near the vicarage.

Ebenezer Brown, as he had described himself to be when first the "new curate" came to Wallingford and drew him out of the mire, was in Hope's mind, as she surveyed

the long line of rough fellows, some fifty of whom came tumbling in, almost falling over each other in their desire to secure the best places at the long table. But there was some order in all their roughness, and much obedience; and when Mrs. Gordon took her place at the harmonium and gave out the hymn, it was most solemn to Hope to hear all those poor working lads joining in the prayer to that "Rock of Ages" who was cleft for them as well as for her. Her own voice, high and clear—so high and clear that the boys marvelled to hear it—rose above all. Such singing gave her inspiration. It never came into her mind to think that she herself was adding to its beauty, or that her presence was contributing to the order and interest that prevailed all through the class. She thought no more of her disappointment at not going to the ragged school in Piggott's Buildings, as she sat beside Mrs. Gordon on the harmonium stool, listening to some of those same sweet sacred histories which she herself had taught to the little ones in Mrs. Adams's kitchen last Sunday, but which struck her with fresh interest as Mrs. Gordon read them and explained them.

When the class was over, one and another boy came forward with their pennies and halfpennies. After they had left, Mrs. Gordon explained to Hope that these were for the purchase of Bibles.

"I dare say," she said, "you observed that some boys had none."

Hope had observed it, and could not refrain from adding that she had been so sorry to see it; and during that walk home she opened her heart to Mrs. Gordon on a subject which had never entered her mind until she came to Ashford, but which had weighed rather heavily on it ever since—the largeness, as it now seemed to her, of her personal means, and the very small amount of good she did with her money.

"Papa gives me fifty pounds a year only for my dress, and I am to have a hundred when I leave school," she said. "I *must* do something with my money now that I see how much there is to do. Oh, Mrs. Gordon, will you teach me? At all events I can begin by giving Bibles to the boys that have none; and I can help to dress those poor little ragged children. May I?"

Mrs. Gordon thankfully accepted her offer of help in clothing some of her poor, but with regard to the Bibles she said,

"I think, Hope, we had better let the boys go on bringing their pennies. They would not value their Bibles half as much if they had not exercised a little self-denial in saving up to buy them. What they purchase themselves is always far more thought of than what is given to them—unless, indeed, it is given as a love-token, and then I have found that none value an offering which is really one of affection, not of what is commonly called charity, more truly than the poor."

And then Mrs. Gordon and Hope talked together of what charity really was, and Hope was glad when Mrs. Gordon said,

"But you will hear more about charity this evening than I can tell you. You know the archdeacon is to give us what is called a charity sermon for the benefit of the new Cottage Hospital. It is always a regret to me when I cannot hear him, he is so very eloquent; but it is my turn to stay with the little ones. Nurse wished me to go instead of her, but I could not consent, for she has never heard him. You will have a treat, Hope, only it will be a very hot evening for such a crowded church as you are sure to have."

CHAPTER XXIV.

It did indeed promise to be a hot evening. The air was overpoweringly sultry, and the appearance of the sky, hanging in a deep blue heavy mass over the town, reminded Hope of her drive with Mrs. Sullivan on that memorable evening. A thunder-storm was impending somewhere, but it kept at a distance, and before tea was over, the rain was falling heavily and the air had considerably cleared ; and when the party set off for church, leaving Mrs. Gordon alone in the house with the four little ones, the storm seemed to be passing off—only to gather again, however, with renewed violence about an hour later.

The church was crowded, as Mrs. Gordon had anticipated, but those who had come merely to hear the arch-deacon's eloquence were doomed to be disappointed.

The storm increased in violence, the gleams of lightning flashed quicker and more fiercely, the forked zig-zags playing round the pillars of the building and interrupting the devotions of all, whilst causing terrible alarm to some ; the thunder crashed nearer and nearer, the storm seemingly having reached its height immediately over them, when suddenly, just as the first verse of the hymn before the sermon was begun, there came a crash, such as none who heard it can ever forget. It was as though every window and every lamp in the church had been smashed at once. So terrible and so sudden was the shock that every voice

stopped singing. Many sank down to the bottom of the pews instantaneously, as though they had been shot ; several women fainted, whilst many persons started backwards as if they had been violently struck, and cries of terror rang through the church. The organist continued, however, to play until he perceived that not a voice was to be heard singing. For a few minutes every one was completely stunned. The vicar, who had been reading prayers, put his hand to his head, not knowing for a second or two what had happened, but feeling as though he had received a heavy blow. Then instantly recovering himself, and perceiving the state of alarm into which the whole congregation had been thrown, and that a great many people had already begun to rush out of the church, he called to the organist to go on playing, and bid the choir to continue to sing, whilst he implored, nay, authoritatively commanded, the congregation not to move from their seats, assuring them that they would be perfectly safe if they would only remain quiet. The organist obeyed, and the choir had sufficiently recovered to do so also, and the hymn was again begun to be sung.

But alas ! but few voices joined in it, and those few were soon drowned in the noise of hurrying feet, cries for help, screams from those who were being pressed forward, their breath almost squeezed out of them by the crowd behind. Panic, an insane, suicidal, selfish panic, had begun, and none could arrest it.

Arthur was sitting at the door of the vicarage pew. He gave one look round as if to see what could be done—such a look as it was, so calm and collected, and bid every one keep still. Hope never forgot his tone or his look. Recalling them afterwards, she said to herself that she could not even imagine any one disobeying a command given to them with that expression of countenance or in that tone of voice.

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Every one in the pew remained perfectly still—Gertrude, Lucy, the three little boys, and Hope. Arthur stood at the door of the pew. To interfere at that moment was useless, and he calmly watched the dense crowd pressing forward in a mass towards the doors. The storm without had considerably abated since the crash which had accompanied the fall of the thunderbolt, and the rain was coming down in torrents, but this no one was in a condition to notice.

The aisles were well-nigh cleared, the church nearly emptied, save of the few who had remained quietly in their seats and the crowd pressing through the doors, when suddenly one fearful cry was heard, and Arthur, who had never ceased his watch, opened the pew door, and with one word of command to Hope—"don't let any one move"—rushed forward. Hope's eyes were riveted on him, as by main force he pushed his way through the crowd—happily a less powerful one now than it had been a few minutes before, when even his strength must have been overborne by it—and raising in his strong arms the figure of a woman, who had fainted and fallen with a small child still clasped to her breast, bore her out of sight. Two or three minutes afterwards he returned.

"Will you take the children home?" he said, addressing himself to Hope; "go out by the south door, and round the square. Tell my mother I will come as soon as I can, but there is plenty of work for my father and me to do."

For Mr. Gordon, having seen that his own children were in safety—kept quietly in the pew by Arthur, had already left the church by the vestry door with the archdeacon, and gone to the aid of the victims of this insane panic.

Hope and the younger children obeyed Arthur's orders now as they had before, and in a few minutes had made their way safely through the quiet square behind the church and the lane that led from it to the back of the vicarage.



The entrance was locked, however ; evidently the servants had not returned ; so they went round to the front door, and this they found wide open. The lamp was burning in the hall, whilst voices, strange voices, and they fancied sobs also, were to be heard upstairs.

A strange scene awaited them in the sitting-room, where one lady was lying on the floor, apparently recovering from a fainting-fit ; another was in Mr. Gordon's large arm-chair, indulging in hysterics ; and several others sat about the room in various conditions of excitement and emotion ; Mrs. Gordon going from one to another with restoratives and words of cheering or command, as the case required, but looking so deadly pale and anxious that Hope could read her intense suspense in her face.

"We are all safe," she said. "Mr. Arthur Gordon will be here directly ; he told me to say so. Oh, Mrs. Gordon, how ill you look—what can we do to help ?"

"Tell me what has happened," said Mrs. Gordon ; "no one seems to know."

And in a few words Hope told the little there was to say ; and Lucy took the little boys upstairs, and kept them quiet there whilst the elder girls assisted Mrs. Gordon in soothing and quieting the ladies in the sitting-room.

The scene in the nursery presented a curious contrast to the scene in the sitting-room, and might have served as a proof of the power which early training possesses in forming habits of unselfishness and self-control.

Mrs. Gordon had been sitting in her nursery, talking to her little ones of that great God of glory, the voice of whose thunder is in the heaven, and whose lightnings lighten the earth, and the two little boys were repeating their evening prayers at her knee, whilst one baby-boy had been laid to sleep in its cradle, and the other lay on her lap with large wakeful eyes fixed on its two little brothers, kneeling, white-

robed, side by side; when suddenly their infantile voices were interrupted by the crash of the thunder-bolt, followed almost immediately by a loud noise in the street below, the sound of many footsteps hurrying past, and of cries of "help" and "fire."

Mrs. Gordon's thoughts rushed, as thoughts ever will, at once to her own nearest and dearest, and laying the wakeful baby beside the sleeping one, she threw open the back window. At that instant a vivid flash of lightning showed her St. Barnabas' Church, standing high and white against the black sky. If fire was anywhere, it was not at St. Barnabas'. She opened the front window. A crowd of people was pouring down the street; the cries of "fire" and demands for "help" were louder than ever.

"Mother will be back soon," she said to the two little boys; "you must each take good care of a baby brother till she comes."

And getting them quickly into their cots, she laid a baby beside each, trusted them to God, and ran to open the house to any and all who would seek its shelter. Returning to her nursery to tell them mother was busy with some sick ladies in the sitting-room, and could not come back just yet, but they must be dear, good children and keep quiet till she did, she found that the sleeping baby had not awoken, in spite of its transfer from its own cradle to its brother's cot, and its little guardian had fallen asleep beside it. But the other twin was still resolutely wakeful; and Mervyn was sitting upright on his pillow beside him, letting him play with his fair curls, and keeping him quiet till mother should come.

And there Lucy still found him, faithful to his charge, when she came in and took the care of the nursery upon herself until nurse and Martha returned, unhurt, in spite of the suffocating crowd through which they had forced their way out of the church, in which they had been ordered to

remain. They had of course stayed to see and hear all that was to be seen and heard, and their report that the streets were now perfectly cleared tended to re-assure the terror-struck women who had taken refuge at the vicarage, and after a little while one and another was content to go home. The last of them had only just gone, when a new excitement was caused by Arthur's return, carrying a little child, which, to his mother's very great bewilderment, he placed in her arms.

"Oh!" exclaimed Hope, "is it the poor young woman's baby?"

"Yes," said Arthur, interrupting any further questioning, "the poor mother was terribly hurt; there was no one to take care of the child to-night. They talked of sending it to the workhouse. There was a good deal of discussion about it, but no satisfactory result seemed likely to follow, so I ended it by bringing it here. I knew that was what you would wish, mother."

"Yes," said Mrs. Gordon, "you did quite right; and the poor mother?"

"We carried her to Parvis', and I must go back to her there; but I will come in again and tell you how things are going on. My father is busier than any one. Many persons have been very seriously hurt."

He did not tell them then how utterly hopeless he knew that poor mother's condition to be, nor did he say that eight other victims to that mad, unreasonable panic had been carried back into the church after they had left it, and laid there dead, until the confusion in the street had subsided and they should be removed to their homes; for these had homes to which they could be carried, but the young mother who had fallen fainting to the ground was, so far as Arthur could discover that night, a stranger to all. None knew where she lived, or who she was. Further

inquiries might elicit some information next day, but to-night there was nothing to be done but to use every effort to save the life which seemed so nearly exhausted. All these efforts, however, proved ineffectual; and just one hour later, Arthur Gordon returned to the vicarage to tell them that the little creature, whom he found still in Mrs. Gordon's arms, was, so far as they could discover, a friendless orphan.

Both Mr. Gordon and Arthur were going out again, for there were many needing ministration of body and soul, but they begged that before they did so they might have the satisfaction of knowing that Mrs. Gordon and the girls had gone to bed. A discussion arose as to who should take charge of the little orphan.

“Not you, my dear,” said Mr. Gordon to his wife. “You look completely exhausted. One baby will be already more than enough for you to-night; and your own is often troublesome.”

“I cannot well give it to nurse,” Mrs. Gordon remonstrated; “she has been so much upset by this terrible fright that I scarcely liked to leave little Walter with her.”

For at night one of the twins was his mother's charge, and nurse took care of the other.

Mr. Gordon proposed Martha's taking the child, but this his wife negatived at once.

“Well, dear, settle it as you like,” said Mr. Gordon; and he was about to leave the room when Hope, who had been longing to make her request ever since the discussion began, summoned courage to ask,

“May I keep him? I should like it so much.”

Mrs. Gordon hesitated, but Hope pleaded, and Arthur settled the matter by saying, as he followed his father,

“Let her have him, mother; it will do her good.”

He saw how excited Hope was—felt that she was not likely to get much sleep, and that the care of the child would only

take off her thoughts from dwelling too much on the scenes of the evening. He had seen the look on her face when that young woman fell under the feet of the crowd. He had watched her listening eagerly for news, with her eyes unnaturally bright and her lips parted, though not to speak, for she had not uttered a word; and he knew that to a girl like Hope, highly nervous, yet possessing a strength of character which enabled her to hold her nerves in control, any active employment which carries off the intensity of feeling in a time of excitement is a blessing. If she sat up all night watching the baby, it would be better for her than to lie awake imagining the dead mother, and going over again in thought all she had gone through that day.

So Hope took the little baby into her bed, after Mrs. Gordon had herself undressed him.

Morning was just beginning to dawn when Mrs. Gordon, softly opening her bedroom door, still found her—not at all to her surprise—sitting up in bed, carefully watching the child. Could Mrs. Grant have seen her at that moment, she might indeed have said she looked like an angel, a guardian angel, watching her sleeping charge.

“I thought as much,” said Mrs. Gordon; “I felt sure you would not sleep. Now you must lie down and go off at once, and I will lie beside you and take care of him. My boy is sleeping soundly, and even if he should wake later in the morning, his father has had such a good rest now that I shall not mind letting him take care of him for a little.”

So Hope lay down, and, in spite of her own convictions to the contrary, fell fast asleep instantly.

Mrs. Gordon watched her most lovingly as she lay there, with the sweetest smile on her rosy lips, though her face still wore the sad look left on it by the impressions of the previous evening. It was very sad to think she had no mother to watch and guide the full development of a bud

of such promise into the fair and fragrant flower, which it could not fail to become, should no unforeseen blight from some untoward source be allowed to fall upon it.

The only information that could be discovered next day concerning the poor young woman who had met her death in so sad a manner, was that she had arrived in Ashford on the previous day, carrying a bundle on one arm and her baby in the other, and had applied for a few nights' lodging at a house in one of the back streets near the church, where a placard in the window announced that lodgings were let. Her appearance was so respectable, and she herself so sweet-looking, that the landlady had not even asked for the payment in advance which she was accustomed to demand from strangers. There were no other lodgers in the house at the time, and the woman felt most thankful now that she had been so much struck by the girl's refined and singularly sorrowful look that she had asked her to take her meals with her on that only day of her sojourn in her house.

"It was so little she had eaten," she said, "that she should scarcely have known what to charge for her food," and she seemed so sorrowful—heart-broken, indeed—that the good woman had sought to discover what her trouble was, not from any motive of curiosity, but in a sincere desire to comfort her. But the young woman had said nothing about herself, only when the landlady had spoken of going to church, she had expressed a wish to go with her, adding that "she thought it would do her good, and if the baby were troublesome she could bring him out."

Nothing further could be learned through the police or in any other way, though every means was taken to discover who she was or where she came from.

Then it was that Hope besought Mrs. Gordon to allow her to ask her father to let her undertake the charge of the little orphan.

"She would do nothing foolish," she said ; "she would follow Mrs. Gordon's advice in everything. The child should be put out to nurse with respectable people, and brought up in the rank of life to which it was evident he belonged ; he should be taught to earn his own living as soon as he was old enough to do so. But she had so much more money allowed her than she at all knew how to use properly. She had wasted so much already. Surely this was an opportunity of doing some good."

Mrs. Gordon listened, sympathized, and advised, and it ended in its being arranged that the boy should be taken care of by a woman in Ashford for the present, and that his future fate should be decided after Hope should have presented her request to her father. This she was not to do until her return home, when she could consult Dr. Andrewes on the subject, and should her aunt Lucilla raise any difficulties, obtain his mediation with Mr. Savile.

CHAPTER XXV.

NEXT morning a letter for Hope lay beside her plate on the breakfast-table. Mrs. Gordon, whose eyes had a true mother's knack of observing everything that passed, saw her face flush as, recognizing the handwriting evidently with surprise, she opened the letter hurriedly, then, after a mere glance at its contents, put it into her pocket unread. Soon after breakfast, coming into the nursery when the children had gone out and she knew that she should find Mrs. Gordon alone with the babies, she said to her,

"I shall not want your friends' escort now. Will you tell me how to let them know? My brother has written to say that he is spending a couple of days in this neighbourhood, and means to sleep at Ashford to-night to take me back to Westbourne with him by the early express to-morrow morning."

Hope had never yet mentioned her brother to Mrs. Gordon or to any of the family. The manner in which she did so now, however, and the recollection of the look on her face when she had first received this announcement that morning, would have been enough to have shown Mrs. Gordon that a journey under her brother's escort was no pleasant prospect to Hope, even if she had not already heard something of that young man's character and conduct from Arthur, who knew contemporaries of his both at school and college.

She reflected for a minute, and then said, "I do not think

we can alter our arrangement with Mr. and Mrs. Lennox now. It is too late to let them know. If your brother wishes, he can join their party, and you can all travel together."

The evident look of relief that passed over Hope's tell-tale face showed Mrs. Gordon how much wisdom there had been in her rapid decision.

"I am afraid there is no time either to let Frank know before he leaves his friend's house," Hope said, "for he says he is coming into Ashford to-night to sleep at the 'Duke's Arms,' to be able to start by the express."

Hope was ashamed to show her brother's ill-written, misspelt, blurred letter, but she read out the few lines which announced his engagement to spend a day or two at "the Firs" with his friend Jack Mapleton, and his intentions with regard to escorting Hope back to Westbourne on the following day.

Mrs. Gordon knew the place and the character of the owner, and she felt more thankful than before to have decided as she had. This feeling was confirmed when the second post brought a note to herself from Miss Lucilla Savile, thanking her, in that lady's most correct style, in Mr. Savile's name and her own, for her kindness to Hope during her stay, and for the escort she had provided for her journey. Evidently Mr. Frank Savile's plans had not been made known to his family.

According to Frank's directions, Hope's reply was addressed to him at the "Duke's Arms," and by Mrs. Gordon's request, she added an invitation to spend the evening at the Vicarage, if he should arrive in time to do so, which Hope sincerely hoped he would not.

It was a busy day, as last days always are, whatever efforts have been made to prepare for them beforehand. Moreover this was a last day for two of the Vicarage party, for Arthur

was also leaving, his plan being to walk to the neighbouring station of Leatherly and there take the train to London, which was now the only one that would bring him there in time for the interview at the hospital next day on which depended his chance of being appointed to the post of resident medical officer. Only three of the numerous candidates for the vacant post had been selected to appear before the committee on the day of election, and Arthur Gordon had reason to know that of these three, he had far the best chance of success.

But most certainly he would not be elected unless he were present on the following day.

For once in his life—his mother often said afterwards that it was the only occasion on which she ever remembered his doing so—Arthur had left things to the last. How much Hope had had to do with this most unusual want of wisdom on his part, she only learned several years afterwards.

Evening came, and the good-byes were said. All but Hope expected soon to see him again, and no one seemed to consider it much of a parting as he went off on his solitary walk. By the high-road it was a five miles' walk, but Arthur knew a shorter cut which would save him at least a mile and a half ; it was through rather a lonely bit of country, certainly—a large bit of waste common, just being prepared to be sold for building ; but he did not mind this, even though it was a dark night, for he knew the place well, and its solitariness afforded him the more opportunity for thought. And at that moment his mind was full of thought—not of the home which he had never before, fond son and brother that he had ever been, felt such a pang at leaving ; nor of the mother to whom he had always been so devoted, and with whom he had just had the most interesting conversation that had ever taken place between them ; but of Hope, whom he had known only for three short weeks.

His mother, coming unexpectedly into his room just before he had left it, had surprised him, and had been herself very much surprised to find him with the coloured photograph of Hope in his hand, which he had taken from the drawer where she herself had placed it on the morning of Hope's arrival; and which he was on the point, not of restoring to its former place on the table, but of putting into his own portmanteau, which he had evidently unstrapped for the purpose. Mrs. Gordon gave one glance at the likeness in his hand, and another at the look on his face.

"Arthur!" she said, and though she said nothing else, the tone in which she uttered that one word carried the full meaning of all that was in her heart into his.

He put the picture into the portmanteau, closed it again, and then turned to his mother and kissed her.

"You need not be afraid, mother," he said.

"I confess I am afraid," she replied, "for why should you carry away that likeness with you? Hope is a child, Arthur—a child of seventeen, and even if she were not, you are not given to indulge in idle dreams. You would never allow yourself to think of her. She is lovely now, and will be even lovelier in a little while, and she is an only daughter and an heiress. It would be madness to think of her."

Arthur had not often heard his mother speak with so much excitement. He smiled as he replied,

"It would indeed be madness, mother, and I am not mad. You need not be the least afraid."

But he did not take the likeness out of his portmanteau, nor did he express to her the thought that remained in his mind. He had no hope—or at least so he said to himself, believing he had none—of ever winning Hope Savile for his wife. But never was the old expression truer than in his case, that he had "lost his heart" to her—the true, strong, faithful heart, on which no woman had ever yet made any

impression, and which so many had said that it would be very hard to win. He meant what he said when he told his mother that he had no intention of indulging any dreams that there was no prospect of his ever being able to realise. But though he never dreamed, or did not imagine that he ever dreamed, of marrying Hope, he would keep the remembrance of her and her sweet ways, of her lovely voice and gentle manner and bright intelligence, as the pleasantest thoughts on which his mind could dwell ; and though she was not likely ever to be his wife, until there was any prospect of her being the wife of any other man, he saw no reason why he might not carry about with him the likeness of her sweet little innocent face.

Thinking such thoughts as these, he was making his solitary way across the lonely road, when his ear caught sound of a horse's steps approaching, evidently at no very rapid speed. He was surprised, for the road was but little frequented except by workmen, and a second thought made him also feel some alarm for the safety of whoever the rider might be, as, at a little distance from where he now was, he had come upon a large drain which had been dug in the ground, and which he had not himself observed until close to it. A horse coming upon this drain in the dark would in all probability be precipitated into it to the imminent risk of his rider's life. Waiting, therefore, until the horse and his rider came close to him, he called to the rider to stop. The only reply he received was a command, accompanied with an oath, to get out of the way, given in a tone of voice which at once showed him the condition of the rider, though all that he could discover of his appearance was that he was a tall, strongly-built man, and seemed young. Instead of obeying the rude command Arthur did exactly the contrary, and finding that the man was about to urge his horse forward, he laid hold of the bridle and said,

"The road is not safe ; a few yards further on there is a deep drain dug. If you persist in going on it will be at the risk of your life."

The young man could scarcely have understood what was said to him, and yet it would almost have seemed as though he had, for he replied, with another oath,

"If you don't let go it will be at the risk of yours."

And as Arthur still kept him back, he raised his whip as though to strike him, bringing it down, however, only on his horse with such violence that the creature started forward, jerking the rein, which Arthur still held, out of his hand, and galloped along the broken road.

At that moment it flashed across Arthur's mind that the rider was in all probability Frank Saville. He was expected that evening from the Firs, and it was possible that a wrong turn in coming from there might have taken him out of the high-road into this waste ground. It was more than probable, too, that he had been drinking at the tavern which Arthur knew stood just off the main road, and which probably had been the cause, first of his turning out of it, and then of his taking the wrong turn on leaving it.

For a moment Arthur stood still, listening to the now rapid steps of the horse.

If he attempted to follow him he must inevitably miss his train, and give up all hope of presenting himself at the hospital next morning. But the chances were ten to one that Frank—if Frank it were, and of this Arthur now felt almost sure—would never regain the high-road in safety, and Arthur could not leave any man, especially any one so closely connected with Hope, in such uncertainty. He retraced his steps, listening intently, but hearing nothing until, just as he thought he must be close to where he had observed the drain, his ear caught some sound, and proceeding in the direction of this sound, he came upon a sight which he never afterwards forgot.

It was just as he had feared it might be. The horse had evidently been suddenly checked in its speed by stumbling into the drain, where it now hung suspended, struggling violently, but quite unable to disengage itself. What had become of the unfortunate rider was a matter for conjecture. Arthur felt along the ground in every direction, but could not see or hear anything. There was nothing left to do but to obtain help from some of the workmen's cottages in the immediate neighbourhood, and this he set himself to procure as speedily as possible, all thought of his journey to London having now passed even from his mind. More than half an hour, however, had elapsed before he could return with the men and lanterns he had procured. Just as they reached the spot, the horse, with a final great struggle, succeeded in extricating himself, and though much cut about the sides from the sharp stones in the trench against which he had been jammed, the terrified creature refused to allow any one to come near him, and made his own way off in the direction of the Firs.

Then, to their horror, they discovered the senseless form of Frank himself, lying at the bottom of the drain, frightfully cut about the head by the kicks which he had received from the horse in its frantic struggles to extricate itself. Arthur entertained but little hopes of his life as he assisted in getting him out of the drain and conveying him to the new cottage hospital, where the surgeon was of the same opinion as himself—that the balance in which his life hung was heavily weighted on the side of death.

Meanwhile the two Gordon boys, who had carried their mother's invitation to the "Duke's Arms," brought back word that the note should be given immediately on his arrival to Mr. Savile, who was to ride over from the Firs in the evening, and had ordered dinner for eight o'clock. Hope had no wish to see her brother at St. Barnabas' Vicarage,

and was too well accustomed both to his ways and his manners to feel any great surprise at no answer to Mrs. Gordon's invitation being received from him. Probably he had intended to answer the note after dinner, but had by that time drunk too much wine to have remembered anything about it. She was, however, greatly startled when a messenger arrived from the "Duke's Arms," to know if Mr. Savile was at the Vicarage.

A groom from the Firs had ridden into Ashford that morning with two notes—one from Mr. Savile himself, ordering dinner and bed, and another from Mr. Jack Mapleton, saying that he was lending one of his horses to his friend to ride into Ashford, and begging the landlord to see that care was taken of the horse until he sent for him next morning. The groom had added the further information on his own account that there was a large party at the Firs which prevented his master's sparing any of his servants that evening; and this information, whilst it inspired the Gordons with some hope that Frank had been induced to change his plans and remain for the dance, had just the contrary effect on Hope. Frank never danced, and never went to evening parties, or, if he could help it, into ladies' society. A dance at the Firs would have hastened rather than delayed his departure, and she felt almost sure of what her friends only feared, that some accident had happened. It was decided that messengers should be sent to the Firs, and these messengers were carefully searching the road that led there whilst Arthur and the men from the cottages were getting Frank out of the drain, and carrying him to the hospital.

Ten o'clock passed—eleven and twelve, and then Hope was made to go to bed, Mrs. Gordon refusing to leave her, and once more lying down beside her, as on the night of the panic at St. Barnabas' and the adoption of Ashford Hope, as the little foundling had been since baptized. Then, for

the first time in her life, the overflows of Hope's anxious burdened heart found their way into another heart ; and Mrs. Gordon received them all with such loving sympathy and tenderness, that the weary girl had been soothed off to sleep, when Mrs. Gordon's quick ear caught the sound, first of footsteps outside the house, then of the opening of a window and the drawing back of the bolt of the front door, and finally of whispered voices in the hall.

Rising so quietly from Hope's side as not to disturb the sleeping girl, she stole softly into the passage, and then, to her relief, heard her husband's voice talking to some one in the study.

Who could it be at that hour of the night or rather of the morning ?

A moment afterwards she had recognized Arthur's voice—Arthur, whom she imagined to be at that moment asleep in his bed in London—and had joined her husband and son in the study.

A very few words explained all to her, and then Mrs. Gordon returned to Hope ; and Mr. Gordon, his mind at ease now as to how he could go with Arthur without disturbing his wife or causing her alarm, went to share his son's anxious vigil beside the apparently dying young man, leaving to her the terrible task of breaking the news to Hope. How thankful Mrs. Gordon felt, on returning to her, for the quiet sleep in which she still found her, and which would bring her strength to bear it.

"Send for Dr. Andrewes," was her first entreaty after hearing as much as Mr. Gordon next morning would allow her to be told ; for there would have been no use in describing to her the fearful mutilation that prevented the possibility of her even taking a look at Frank, whom indeed she would scarcely have recognized, so terribly was he disfigured by the kicks he had received.

"Send for Dr. Andrewes," she begged; "and please tell him not to let papa know until I come. I must tell him myself—at all events I must be with him when he is told."

And then a few more of Hope's until now unnamed heart-burdens were poured into Mrs. Gordon's motherly heart, opened at that moment in all the fulness of its sympathy to receive them; and though these heart-secrets were whispered in few words, scarcely indeed more than hinted at, where sympathy is keen detail is but little needed. Mrs. Gordon understood all about it: Miss Lucilla must not know what had really happened until some one was at hand to break the sad tidings to Mr. Savile more tenderly and wisely than she would do. The result of Hope's scarcely uttered confidences was that a carefully-worded telegram was despatched to Dr. Andrewes, which brought an immediate reply naming the hour at which he would be at Ashford that afternoon.

"He's a good-for-nothing young fellow as ever lived to trouble his family," he said to Arthur, who had met him at the station, as they walked together to the hospital. "If no one but himself had been concerned, he might have broken his skull ten times over without my caring two straws about it; but his father is a friend of mine, and a patient in whom I take the deepest interest, and the girl is a treasure—Hope, I mean," he added. "I look upon her as my own child, as I only wish she were. She's a gem, sir, a rare gem; and I would go through a good deal more than this to be of the smallest use to *her*."

Arthur did not answer. The doctor gave him one quick glance of his sharp eyes from under his thick black eyebrows, and some idea of the truth flashed into his mind.

Frank's case was a serious one, he saw at once, but he also saw that it was in able hands; and his advice to Hope, when she met him at the Vicarage door and turned her wan

questioning face up to his, was that she should return with him at once to Westbourne, and that they two should together break the news to Mr. Savile, and do their best in helping him to bear it.

"I said nothing to any one but my wife," he told her, as they went together into Mr. Gordon's study; "but I have already got this young Mr. Gordon—a capital fellow he seems—to telegraph in his mother's name that your return home is delayed of necessity until to-morrow. We will go up by the early express. I have prevailed on young Gordon to let me take his place to-night in watching the case; but Frank is in good hands, both with him and the hospital surgeon. You and I will be more wanted at Westbourne than here. I must take you back to your father, Hope."

"And leave Frank to die?" cried Hope, with agony in her voice.

"We must hope he will not die," said the doctor. "At all events he will not die yet. If we remained we could do nothing for him, and we cannot leave your father to bear this shock alone."

"Oh no, no! I must go back to papa; but oh, Dr. Andrewes, will Frank ever regain consciousness?"

"We cannot tell, my child; no one can say now what will be the end."

Hope burst into tears, sobbing so bitterly that the kind doctor could not bear to see her, and was inexpressibly thankful when Mrs. Gordon came into the room.

"Women have a way of comforting each other," he said to himself; "and one has only to look at *that* woman's face to see she has a mother's heart. I can't do better than leave the poor child to her."

So he went in search of Mr. Gordon to communicate to him his plans; and Mrs. Gordon, taking Hope into her arms,

comforted her with those caresses which bring soothing to the overstrung nerves, and with that one word which is the only sheet-anchor to any torn and questioning heart.

"God is love, Hope, and He knows. His will must be done ; and His will *is* love, whatever it may seem."

"I had not thought she cared for her brother so much," said the doctor to Mr. Gordon, as he told him of the agony of grief in which he had just left Hope. "I'm sure there was nothing in him to win any one's love, least of all that of a high-minded, refined girl like her. They had not a thought or feeling in common."

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Gordon. "But the less cause he gave her for happiness, the more cause no doubt she has now for sorrow. Death is a serious thing to us all—a very terrible thing to those who have lived as I fear this poor young man has lived. There is a hereafter, Doctor Andrewes."

"Of course, of course," said the doctor.

But though he said "of course," and though few men could have had much more opportunity of seeing how serious a thing the thought of this hereafter is to those who find themselves on the point of experiencing it, the sense of its importance had never forced itself upon his mind until now, when he saw Hope in this agony of sorrow, and felt that he had no word to comfort her. Happily for Hope, Mrs. Gordon had, and when she came into the sitting-room to wish her old friend good-night, though she looked very weary, and her sweet face was sorrowful, the anxiety had passed from it.

Mrs. Gordon helped her to undress, and sat beside her, reading some of those words of comfort which Hope could not at that moment have read for herself, but which fell upon her heart with power both to heal and strengthen.

"You do not doubt God now, do you, dear child?" asked Mrs. Gordon.

And Hope could answer truly that she did not. She felt that He was her Father, and was it not in hours of trouble that a father took the greatest care of his children? He was her Shepherd, and was it not when the lamb was wounded that the shepherd laid it most tenderly upon his shoulder, and carried it most safely in his arms? He was her Pilot, and was it not when the wind blew fiercest, and the storm rose highest, that the pilot put forth all his skill to direct and guide the bark. To Him she looked in faith that even now He would save Frank. In Him she trusted for strength and wisdom to break the news tenderly to her father, and to help him to bear it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"AND you would advise me to sign the pledge?"

"I did not say so," was the reply; "I have never signed it myself, so that I am scarcely in a position to advise another man to do so. It is for you to consider how far it might be a help to you in enabling you to overcome temptation, and hold to your resolutions."

The first speaker was Frank Savile, lying weak and very helpless on the sick-bed, which had so nearly proved to him the bed of death. The second was Arthur Gordon, sitting patiently beside him, as he had sat for many long hours both of the day and night during the last weeks.

A little table stood beside the bed, a lamp upon it, the light of which, shaded from the sick man's sight, fell upon the small Bible from which his companion had just been reading to him.

How many times had not Hope Savile, kneeling before her God, thanked Him, with all the fervour of which her heart was capable, for His mercy in sparing Frank's life, and prayed Him to bless with His richest blessings him who had been the instrument of this mercy. Dr. Andrewes had come and gone to and from Ashford constantly, and each time that he had returned to Westbourne it had been to dwell in yet stronger terms than before on all that they owed to Arthur Gordon. Yet neither Dr. Andrewes or Hope knew what was the true amount of that deep debt of grati-

tude. As the heaven is higher than the earth, as eternity is longer than time, so is the value of the soul compared with that of the body; and this immortal, undying soul of Frank's, Arthur Gordon had been the means of saving. Had he not been made the instrument of first saving his earthly life, he would never have gained sufficient influence over him to have been made afterwards the instrument of saving his soul. God's hand was in it all. He had been allowed to draw the poor mangled body out of the deep pit where it lay, that he might be allowed to draw the far more miserable soul out of the deeper pit of corruption, where it lay in danger of a far worse death.

Frank was long before he woke to consciousness, and then the only thought that he was able to realise was this one—that he was in danger of death. His terror was terrible to witness. The hospital surgeon feared a relapse, and begged Arthur to remember how necessary it was to remove every source of excitement, and to soothe his fears with hopes of recovery.

But Arthur would not consent to anything that was to him like fighting against God. He would neither increase his terror or take from it. He told him the whole truth, and when Frank, in the agonies of an awakened and alarmed conscience, cried aloud for mercy, he showed him where that mercy was to be found: and strong man that he was, controlled and self-possessed beyond other men, Arthur Gordon himself shed tears, as, kneeling beside the bed where Frank lay sobbing like a child, he, at Frank's earnest entreaty, besought the God who had so long been his Father and his Friend to have mercy also on this prodigal son, who sought to return to his Father's house, yet feared that he had offended too deeply to be ever received there.

From early childhood, Arthur Gordon had learned and had loved to pray; but Frank Savile's conversion was to

him a new revelation of the power of prayer. And yet Arthur himself never dreamed of the fulness of reply which God was about to give to the earnest, confident prayers which were made to Him for the salvation of this young man's soul.

Dr. Andrewes came and went. He left Arthur to return to Hope, and he left Hope to return to Arthur ; and as he drew near to both in that close intimacy which mutual anxiety inspires, he felt that there was a something in both these young people, mere children compared to him, which he had not in himself, and which gave them a wisdom and a strength which he had never known.

Something of this he summoned courage to say one day to Mrs. Gordon, who made reply—

"It is only that they are both God's children, abiding in Him. And what wisdom have any of us, save what we receive from Him who *is* wisdom? What strength, save that which we have in Him who *is* strength?"

For years Mrs. Gordon had known how closely Arthur had been walking with God, but the experiences of the last few weeks had shown her how much more Hope also knew of this hidden life than she had at all imagined.

Possessed as she was of high natural spirits, with a keen appreciation of all that earth has to give of the bright and beautiful, and a singular power both of enjoying it and of expressing her enjoyment to others, the real depth of Hope's religion, the strength of her faith, and the intensity of her devotion, lay concealed from the observation of many. Even Mrs. Gordon, observant as she was and truly sympathetic, had never realised the advance that Hope had made in all spiritual graces. Accustomed as she was to the quiet self-possession and the habitual self-control of her own Elsie, she had not fully realised that Hope, with all her high spirits and love of fun and natural impetuosity, was yet in no

degree behind her friend in real childlike love to her God, submission to His will, and trust in His goodness.

Now she saw these graces shining clearly forth, and, what was of far more consequence, Dr. Andrewes saw them clearly too. Mrs. Gordon's few words on the subject had given him the key to what had seemed to him a great mystery, and had set him thinking deeply. If the wisdom and strength that he saw in these young people came from God, then, he said to himself, that was the reason why he could not understand it, for he knew nothing of God. He had been a moral man, or as people often called it, a good man, from his youth ; but as for religion, he had never had anything to do with it. His busy life as a medical man with a large practice kept him from going to church. The Bible was to him a sealed book, and if he ever thought of death, as a man constantly in its presence could scarcely fail to do, it was only to put off the thought to a more convenient season, until the time should come for him to be laid upon a bed of sickness, or for his strength to fail, or some sign to show itself of an approaching end to his busy, active life.

But of this none had ever appeared. At sixty-five his step was as firm, his form as erect, his brain as clear, and his vigour as great as they had been at thirty. So he had gone in and out amongst the sick and dying for long years, not allowing himself to think of the time when he might be as they now were. He had followed many and many to the grave, without one thought of the day when others would be following his dead body as he now followed theirs.

If, as often happened, his patients were unhappy, uneasy at the remembrance of past sins, anxious concerning the retribution awaiting them in an unknown world, he recommended their friends to let them see a clergyman ; such matters were no concern of his. His work was to cure their sickness of body, and leave the care of their souls to them-

selves and to others. But it was different when Frank was the patient, and Hope the anxious friend most nearly concerned ; and it fell to him not only, and indeed not chiefly, to prescribe for him medically, but also to share long nights of watching beside him, to listen to his outpourings—often unconscious, but at times conscious outpourings—of repentance, and to his terrible fears and forebodings of God's judgments, and also to sit beside his bed while Mr. Gordon read and prayed with him.

The Vicar and Mrs. Gordon, Arthur and Hope, were already rejoicing on earth with the angels in heaven over one poor soul repenting of its sinfulness, but He who sees further even than the angels, had marked, not one soul, but two, as the fruits of those long hours of prayer and faith on the part of his believing children.

CHAPTER XXVII.

years had passed since we left Frank Savile struggling back to life—temporal, spiritual, and eternal—after a conflict with the evil powers of this world and the underworld, disease and sin and Satan. So serious had his injuries that his recovery had been pronounced—as recoveries often are pronounced, with far more truth than those who utter the words imagine—“a miracle.” Arthur had seen at once that his leg was badly fractured, the injury to the head was so terrible as to make this at the moment a matter of very small consequence. It was the concussion of the brain that Arthur had expected his death to take place immediately, as he lay motionless and insensible, his body pale and cold, the lids of his eyes contracted and insensible to light, his pulse weak and intermittent, and his breathing coming only with deep sighs. Even after hopes of his life began to be entertained, there seemed little prospect of perfect recovery. For weeks it was thought that such a severe shock would produce some permanent injury to the brain, that the intellect would be impaired or some special faculty blunted, or that there would be some failure of the muscular power which had always been so strong. But none of these fears had been realised. Frank's recovery, though very slow, had been complete, and he had come out from that fierce conflict an altered man.

When the day came for his return to Westbourne, after eight weeks spent at Ashford, first in the hospital and then at St. Barnabas' Vicarage, Hope herself drove the cream-coloured ponies to the station to meet him, Ben seated behind her, his plain but honest features radiant with a smile as bright as hers. Very different were Hope's feelings now to those which she well remembered on the last occasion when she and Frank had been together at that same station, and the very waiting-woman had expressed her pity for her and her hope that she was nothing nearer to him than a sister. That same woman, watching them on the day of his return from Ashford, had observed a change in his look and manner, different from even what such a terrible illness might have been expected to produce. It was not only that he was pale and thin—his illness would have accounted for that, but his very countenance was altered; it had a subdued expression, and so had his voice, as he thanked one and all for their assistance and attentions. Even the railway servants, who all knew him well, observed the difference, and as the train went off they gathered round the porter who had been helping with his luggage to hear what he had to say.

"He *be* different!" was the man's remark. "Why you wouldn't know him again. He *be* as weak as a baby still, and awkward enough at using those crutches; he nearly slipped out of the carriage when the old gentleman and I were getting him into it, and Ben a-holding the horses that were ready to start at a moment's notice. In other days he'd have sworn at the whole lot of us, and cursed his lame leg till you'd have been most scared to hear him; but lor, he never said a word, but was as quiet and gentle as Miss herself could have been. They say he's signed the pledge, and given up the drink for ever. Well, if that's what comes of it, I've a mind to sign myself. Lor, how glad my missus

would be. I believe she'd be willing for me to break *my* leg and be out of work for three months, and have the nursing of me all that time, if she thought I'd never touch a drop of the drink afterwards ; though I've never drunk to speak of, not like he used, or I should not be where I am now."

That had been two years ago, and very, very happy had been the two years that had passed since then—so happy, that there had been little to tell concerning them, for when life seems monotonous to others it is often happiest to ourselves.

One sorrow only had come to Hope Savile since that great joy that had resulted from her visit to Ashford, and been the rich answer to the prayer which she had imagined unheard or refused, and this one sorrow had been softened by many circumstances. Mary Raymond's marriage to a missionary in India had been followed a very few months afterwards by her death. It was a real sorrow to Hope, and she felt deeply for her father and for Victor ; but she had never expected to see her friend again after her marriage, and she had all the comfort of the "sure and certain hope," and there was no bitterness in this trial as there had been in so many others.

In her own home no changes or chances had come since the great change that had altered the whole course of at least three lives ; but this had been no matter of regret, since the tenor of the life that had flowed since then had been so happy and so calm.

The very house at Marylands was different from what it had been when first Hope returned to it ; but the changes in it had been wrought so gently and gradually that even Miss Lucilla had been almost unconscious of them. To have turned the stiff, untasteful drawing-room into a pleasant, comfortable everyday abiding-room by a few bold strokes

effected in a day or a week, would have raised such a storm as would never have subsided ; but, little by little, flowers and even birds had found their way into it, and stiff, ungainly ornaments on all the tables had given place to work-baskets and writing-cases, books and other articles of daily use ; and as friends approved and visitors increased, and the house became a pleasant resort to many whose acquaintance Miss Lucilla had coveted, but had never been able to make, she not only allowed the changes, but even appropriated to herself the chief credit of them.

Frank would give a sly smile at Hope sometimes, as their aunt was heard to say to one and another that "they liked the room best as it was arranged now ; birds made it cheerful, and flowers were an ornament everywhere, and a room never became really comfortable until one lived in it, etc., etc., etc."

At such times the old doctor would be jealous for his little Hope, and tempted openly to give all the credit where it was due ; but on these occasions Frank himself would be the first to say, "Let her alone, my dear sir, pray. My aunt is quite welcome to the credit so long as we have the comfort, as we assuredly have."

They certainly had. A happier or a brighter home than Marylands could not have been found in Westbourne or anywhere else, and of this bright, happy home Hope Savile was, albeit quite unconsciously, the presiding genius.

Had Wordsworth's poem been written expressly to describe her, it could scarcely have done so more accurately—with the exception indeed of the small matter of colouring, for there was nothing dusky about even her hair. But a true "phantom of delight" was she to many, a most "lovely apparition," and the secret of all the charm and all the power of her "household motions light and free, and steps of virgin liberty ;" of her "reason firm, and temperate will,"

of her "endurance, foresight, strength and skill," was indeed derived from "the very pulse of the machine," from the full consciousness of that fact—the realisation of which is the motive-power of all useful, self-denying lives—that she was "a traveller between life and death."

"A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command ;
And yet a spirit still, and bright
With something of an angel-light."

Frank doted on her ; so did her father ; and even Miss Lucilla's cold heart had been warmed into something like affection by the sweet sunshine of her constant companionship.

It had been by Hope's express desire that Miss Lucilla had remained in her old position as housekeeper ; and this arrangement, which Hope had insisted on rather against the wish of her brother and the doctor, now regularly established as the family adviser in all domestic debates, had gone far towards establishing the happy relations which existed between aunt and niece.

Moreover, Miss Lucilla dearly loved society, and this taste had only increased with increasing years. It used to be a grievance to her that invitations came but rarely and visitors at Marylands were somewhat few in number, but since Hope's return this source of discontent had greatly lessened ; and now that Hope was nineteen, and regularly introduced into society, it had ceased to exist altogether. Miss Lucilla Savile, as the chaperone of her young niece, whose very appearance was an adornment to any drawing-room, and whose music and singing were the chief attractions of every musical party, was invited everywhere, and the only difficulty of late had been in so arranging the claims of society as not to allow them to interfere with that duty

to her father which Hope resolutely made paramount to every other.

Mr. Savile could scarcely now be called an invalid ; he joined the family circle at meals, and spent the greater part of the day with them : even the wheel-chair had been stored away in the coach-house, and Hope enjoyed almost daily the delight of taking him for pleasant drives in the pony-carriage, and of walking with him in the garden, which, under her care, and by means of Ben's unfailing energy, had become in summer time a perfect show of brightness and beauty. Still, he would never be strong enough to take any part in society ; his enfeebled nervous system demanded a quiet life, free from noise and care, and this it was Hope's constant effort to secure for him.

Her rides with Frank during his visits to his home, which both he and Hope now strove to make as frequent as possible, her drives with her aunt, the friends she received so gracefully at home, the parties to which she accompanied Miss Lucilla, were never allowed to interfere with her father's comfort, or with the companionship which formed the chief happiness of the old man's life. For in all but years he *was* an old man, and though comparatively well, he was still so weak in mind and body that no one could look at his thin pale face and dull eye, or listen to his feeble voice, without realising how much care he still needed, or believing in the truth of Dr. Andrewes' oft-repeated assertion that, notwithstanding the great improvement of late years in his health, any sudden shock to his nervous system might prove fatal.

"He is not fit to weather any more storms," the doctor would say sometimes to Hope ; "so let us thank God that he has got into smooth water at last, and that we may feel pretty sure that there are no more breakers a-head."

"Let us thank God," he said ; and he said it from his heart, with a knowledge of that God into whose service, at

the eleventh hour, he had entered. But it had been at the eleventh hour, and therefore, though so much older in years, he was far younger in faith than either Hope Savile or Arthur Gordon ; and in spiritual things the old man felt himself to be learning continually from these two young creatures, albeit they themselves were quite unaware that they were teaching.

"That girl is my constant teacher," the doctor would say to his wife, "and that young man yet more so. I thank God every day for the singular providence that took me to Ashford—'chance' I should have called it in other days ; and so it was, for chances are the unexpected accidents that befall us in the course of a changeful life ; but I see now that these accidents, that come so unexpectedly to us, come by the ordering of One wiser than we are, and I bless the chance that led to such a change in my life as has been wrought by my call to Ashford, and by that young man's taking up his abode here."

For Arthur Gordon was now settled at Westbourne as junior partner to Dr. Andrewes. Some of his friends had expostulated with the doctor on his folly in taking at once as partner in such an extensive practice a young man whom he had known for so short a time, and who could have had but little experience. But Dr. Andrewes knew what he was about. More knowledge of character, he declared, was often gained in days of extreme intimacy, than could be acquired in years of surface acquaintance ; and circumstances had so led to the manifestation of Arthur Gordon's sterling qualities that he had no fear lest he should be making a mistake in asking him to share his work and its profits.

With the liberality which was a part of his nature, the terms he proposed were handsome. Arthur never forgot his mother's face when he told her of the offer that Dr. Andrewes had made him.

"Oh, Arthur!" she said, "and I have been faithless enough to sigh many and many a time over your having lost the appointment which we have good reason to know you would have obtained, if it had not been for Frank Savile's accident; and this will secure to you three times as good an income."

And then a quick shadow passed across her face, and Arthur perceived that some sudden thought was dimming in some degree the first great delight which his tidings had inspired.

"Well, mother, what is it?" he asked. "Could anything be a greater subject of thankfulness? I can scarcely realise the fact of such a career being so suddenly opened before me. To work under such a man as Dr. Andrewes will be a continual training; and, as you say, the income he already offers me is three times larger than I should have had at the hospital. It will enable me to help you and my father as I never could have done there—to be of some real use in getting on the younger children. Mother, what drawback can you see?"

A smile, a very sweet but rather sad smile, was on his mother's face as she replied,

"You will be constantly with Hope Savile, my son. You know she is like a child to Doctor and Mrs. Andrewes, and you say that the doctor hopes you will be much more at their house than in your lodgings; you will be constantly thrown in her society."

"Yes, mother, and will not that be an additional delight—one of the greatest of the many great advantages?"

"May it not be a very great trial also, Arthur?"

"Mother," he replied, "you said just now that you had been faithless about me. Do not be faithless again. Surely you remember our conversation on this subject once before. What I said then I can say much more emphatically now,

when time has tested the strength of my resolutions. I never expect to see a girl like Hope again, nor do I ever wish to do so. I have no desire to be anything to her but the friend I thank God I am. I shall never marry, mother ; my life can be spent very happily in working for you and the children. You need not fear my ever taking advantage of the intimacy into which circumstances have thrown me with Hope—especially since she persists in considering herself under obligation to me—to win her affections, or to lead her to take any step which I know would be displeasing to her friends. You need not fear either for her or for me, mother.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THIS had been said two years ago, and by this time Mrs. Gordon had herself almost ceased to think of the fears which had marred the first pleasure of Arthur's partnership with Dr. Andrewes.

Life at the Vicarage since then had gone as smoothly as at Marylands. The only great change that had happened had been Elsie's return from France, to be in her home all that Elsie might have been expected to be—the companion and comfort of her mother, the friend and governess of her sisters, and, as he fondly called her, the “little curate” of her father.

Hope had rarely been to Ashford since her last eventful visit—but twice indeed, and then only for a short time; for now that Mr. Savile was so far restored to health and to the enjoyment of life, he missed his daughter's companionship so much that she did not like to deprive him of it. But Elsie had paid several visits to Westbourne. It was quite an established thing now that she should spend her holidays with Hope; and very delightful times those were to the friends, now closer friends than ever, with a friendship matured by time and circumstances, and deep mutual interests and sympathies. Though she was able now to be but little at Ashford, Hope's name was a household word to Elsie's poor people, and many a comfort found its

way into their homes, which Elsie never could have provided had it not been for Hope's liberality.

Her friendship too was extended now to Gertrude, Laura, and the boys. Huge boxes were constantly arriving at the Vicarage, and it used to be the astonishment of all when these were opened to see how the gifts sent for each were just what each seemed most to want. Arthur declared on one occasion that he never meant in future to ask where any of the things had come from which had found their way into the Vicarage since he was last there, since to one and all of his inquiries he received the same reply—"Hope sent it."

Even the new piano and Mrs. Gordon's pretty writing-table had been the "united gifts" of Hope and Frank, sent with that "grateful love" which dwelt deep in both their hearts, leading them to feel that whatever efforts they might make to show their gratitude, such efforts must always be but poor and faint compared with the feeling which prompted them.

Frank's accident had led to his exchanging into another regiment, and this had been a great help to him, making it easier for him to form new habits and lead a new life away from old associations and former companions. True repentance, such as his had been, leads to full confession, and he had concealed nothing from Mr. Gordon, asking him to let his father know, through Hope, how heavily he was in debt. Poor little Hope! it fell to her to soften every blow that came to her father by receiving it first herself. But this was not a very terrible blow. The sum total of the debts, heavy as they were, did not seem very great to so rich a man as Mr. Savile, and he discharged them at once, urged to do so by Hope and the doctor, and only opposed by Miss Lucilla, who declared that "they were fools to believe in any repentance or reformation of Frank's; in another year they would see if he was not just as bad as ever." But Hope pleaded, and the doctor urged, and Miss

Lucilla herself knew that her brother's health did not allow of any worry or contradiction, and the debts were paid.

Not one year, but two, had passed since then, and Frank's reformation had stood so manfully the tests both of time and temptation, that even his aunt Lucilla no longer spoke of disbelieving it. He was the steadiest fellow in his regiment, of which he was adjutant; and had never once broken the pledge which, with trembling hand, he had signed in his sick-room at Ashford.

"It has been the greatest help to me," he would say. "I can't speak for others. No one can. But I can only say for myself that it has made my way far easier; and surely we should be thankful for anything that makes a hard way easier. And none know how hard is the way back from intemperance to soberness except those who have tried it. There are times when the craving, the mad, insane craving, for the old stimulant is almost overpowering; and then it is a help to remember the signed pledge, signed with one's own prayers and the prayers of others. And especially has it been a help to me in company. Often when it would have been utterly useless to have put higher and stronger reasons before those who tempted me, when to do so would only have led the way to ceaseless arguments and ridicule, the merely saying 'I have signed the pledge, and I don't suppose you would ask a fellow to break his word,' has put an end to the whole thing. And now that I'm known as a total abstainer, I get but little ridicule. It's the first step that costs in this as in other things; and total abstinence is the wisest first step that any one can take who has gone as far on the road of intemperance as I had done."

Thus Frank would speak to Hope now, and she no longer thought that signing the pledge might be looked upon as a slighting of the baptismal vow. The two things, she saw plainly, had nothing to do with each other. More

than a year after he had signed the pledge Frank was confirmed. Then he realised how great a help to him, in striving to keep the vows of his baptism, would be those habits which the signing of the pledge had so greatly helped in enabling him to form.

By his own wish he had gone to Ashford to be confirmed at St. Barnabas' Church, and Hope had gone with him, only for a few days, for, as we have said, she rarely could be persuaded to leave her father; and oh! how much did she regret afterwards to have left him even for that short time. But what a bright, happy time it was, sent, as Mrs. Gordon tried to convince her, and as later she herself was able to feel, to prepare her for what was to come after; and to strengthen both her own soul and Frank's.

It had been nearly a year since Mrs. Gordon had seen Hope, and during that year she seemed to have grown from a child into a woman; and, as Mrs. Gordon herself had prophesied would be the case, a most lovely woman, with that grace of voice and manner which charm even more than actual beauty.

. How strong must be the faith, how powerful the realisation of the Master's presence—Mrs. Gordon thought to herself—which could keep a soul staid and sanctified in the midst of such attractions as the world had to offer to one in Hope's circumstances, endowed with Hope's charms. Yet, when next day she talked with Hope—one of those talks which Hope never had with any one but Mrs. Gordon—her fears were laid to rest. In the midst of all the interests and attractions of the world, it was easy to see that Hope retained ever in her mind the abiding sense of the Saviour's love and the liege service that she owed Him. Life to her at present was very bright and happy, but whilst delighting in its innocent amusements and pure affections, her heart remained single and unsullied, and her Lord still

held the mastery there ; the innermost recesses of her soul were kept sacred for Him.

On the evening before Hope's return to Westbourne, Doctor and Mrs Andrewes sat together in their pretty drawing-room, amidst the birds and flowers—the birds that Hope fed, and the flowers that she tended daily—talking of her. For Hope was a daily visitor now, and these had seemed blank days without her. They sat and talked of her, and from talking of her they talked of Arthur, and the friendship that existed between the young people ; and Mrs Andrewes confided to her husband the hope that had for some time now existed in her heart that this friendship might ripen into a stronger and deeper feeling.

"She loved Hope so dearly," she said ; "and she was growing so fond of Arthur too—every day she liked him better. It would be a great delight to her if these young people, for both of whom she cared so much, were to care for each other ; and sometimes she fancied that young Gordon *did* care for Hope, although he was so reticent and reserved it was difficult to tell. What did the doctor think?"

Thus questioned, the doctor took his spectacles off, put his newspaper away, folded his arms, and confided to his wife a conversation—if that could be called a conversation which had consisted of only a few sentences exchanged on either side—which he had had with young Gordon only the evening before.

"I don't think about it," he began by saying—"I feel perfectly sure that he cares for her. I found it out two years ago, before I had been ten minutes in his company, on that first afternoon that I was sent for to Ashford."

"My dear," exclaimed his wife, "how? I should have thought that he was the last man in the world to have betrayed his feelings so quickly. But there's no deceiving you; you guessed it, I suppose, by the way he looked at her?"

"No, I did not, for I had not seen them together. I guessed it from the way he looked at me, or rather did *not* look at me or answer me, when I remarked, as we walked together up to the cottage hospital, that Hope was a rare treasure, or something of that sort. I guessed it then, and made pretty sure of it afterwards, and now I know it for a fact."

"And does *she* care for him?" asked the old lady, roused into unusual animation by her interest in the subject; "do you think she will marry him?"

"Whether she cares for him or not is more than even my ingenuity has been able to discover; but as to marrying him, I suppose she will wait to be asked, and I doubt his asking her."

"Why?" asked the old lady; "did he tell you?"

"Not exactly; but I sounded him on the subject last night. It is not my way, as you know, to interfere with any one's affairs—least of all their love affairs; but I had my reasons for seeking to win this young man's confidence. I like him, Dorothy, better than I could have thought I should ever have liked any young man, and it would be the greatest relief to my mind if I could see our little Hope safe in the keeping of such a man as that before I die. She'll be an orphan before many years are over her head, and a rich woman. Her father has got everything in his favour just at present, but, at the longest, his lease of life is a short one."

"And why should he not ask her, since you are sure he cares for her? why should he not at all events seek to win her affections?"

"You had better try and find out, my dear; perhaps you'll succeed better than I have. Women are cleverer, I believe, at meddling with other people's business than men. This is the first time I've ever tried my hand at it, and I feel I've

made a hash of it. Arthur Gordon is not a man to open his heart very readily to any one, but I did hope he might have confided more in me. All I can gather from the very little I could get out of him was that he would never ask any woman to share her wealth with him, or live upon his wife's money, and certainly he has not any of his own to maintain a wife in the manner of life to which Hope has been accustomed."

"A very quixotic feeling," said Mrs. Andrewes.

"Very, no doubt," replied the doctor; "it's a pity there's no discerning mother in the case to make things straight between them."

"A great pity," said Mrs. Andrewes.

And the old lady's arm-chair somehow wheeled itself at that moment a little closer to the doctor's, and her thin hand was laid softly on the knee from which the newspaper had just fallen.

"Only," she said, "one would have to be sure of the feelings of both parties, or one might try to act a mother's part."

"And we are not at all sure of Hope's; indeed I believe myself the child is quite heart-whole as regards Arthur Gordon; moreover, he told me himself that he knew both her aunt and her brother fully expect her to make a brilliant marriage; indeed, I fancy there is something talked of already."

"Sir Wilmot Kinnersley," said the old lady.

"Yes," said the doctor. "Who told you about it?"

"Some people calling here said he was evidently immensely taken with her. That would be a brilliant marriage, certainly, for a girl in Hope's position. Fancy our little Hope married to the member for the county."

"I would far rather see her married to Doctor Andrewes' junior partner," replied the old man, "though I've nothing

to say against Sir Wilmot. His character is as good as his family, but he's not good enough for Hope ; her husband should be her equal in everything, especially in intellect and cultivation, which after all are the things of most importance, next to high principle."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON the occasion of this return to Westbourne, Hope was met by her father himself, the first time for several years now that he had been to the station. Great was her delight as she saw his thin bent figure standing on the platform with his arm in Ben's. It was such a proof, she said to herself, of his restored health and renewed interest in life, and he was looking so well and cheerful : she need not have reproached herself as she had done for remaining even those few days away from him, for he had evidently not suffered from her absence. She took his arm in hers, and as Ben returned to the ponies which he had left in charge of a porter, even these two men remarked to each other what a picture the father and daughter were—the worn-out old man, still so good-looking in his weakness, and the young girl so lovely in her fresh, bright beauty.

“She's a rare handsome one, is your young lady,” remarked the porter to Ebenezer.

“And as good as she's handsome,” replied Ebenezer, in the very same words that Mary Raymond had used to Mrs. Sullivan in answering the same remark years before.

“And as rich as she is both, if folks say true,” added the porter. “We hear she's got a power of money, and does a deal of good with it.”

“That's true, too,” said Ben, as, asking the porter to hold the ponies' pretty heads again for a moment, he went forward

to meet his master and help his young mistress to settle him comfortably in his carriage.

It was quite true ; but how long can one count upon anything remaining just as it now is in this world of ceaseless change and chance.

The second post had come in whilst they were out. Lunch was also ready, the butler informed them, and Hope knew that her father must be in want of his, for it was past his accustomed hour, and a drive before lunch was an unusual thing for him.

So leaving Ben to see that he was comfortably settled in the dining-room, she ran quickly upstairs to lay aside her hat and travelling cloak, with just one quick glance at the letters which told her there were none of any interest for any one.

Miss Lucilla was lunching out, so Hope gave her travelling things quickly to Margery, and with merely a word of greeting to the devoted little maid, waiting as usual to receive her in her room, she ran quickly down to the dining-room to give Mr. Savile his luncheon.

What a sight awaited her there ! Her father, whom she had left so well and happy not five minutes before, had fallen forward on the luncheon-table, and lay apparently lifeless—no one in the room with him.

Hope's cry of terrified anguish brought Margery and Ben to her aid before the butler could get back from the cellar, where he had gone to fetch some particular wine which his master himself had just ordered, at the same time telling Ben to "go and get his dinner, which must have been waiting some time for him ;" bidding him to "give him his letters, and he would read them whilst Miss Hope was taking off her things"—those letters which Hope had imagined were of no consequence !

Even now, she did not for a moment connect her father's

sudden seizure with the idea of any unexpected tidings conveyed to him by the letters which had fallen to the ground, and remained there, unheeded both by herself and the servants. If any idea found its way into her mind, it was that the morning-drive had been too much for him, or that a sudden chill had seized him; but at such moments there is not much time or power for collected thought.

Once again Hope exclaimed, "Send for Dr. Andrewes!" and then with Ben's assistance she raised her father's head from the table and laid it on her own shoulder until the men lifted him from his chair, and carrying him into the library—an easy task, he was so thin and light—laid him on the sofa: exchanging glances with each other as they did so, which told that it was their belief that even Dr. Andrewes could do nothing for him now.

Whilst awaiting his arrival and that of Miss Lucilla, who had also been sent for, every restorative was used that any one could suggest, but all in vain. It was some small comfort afterwards to be told that even had a medical man been on the spot when the seizure occurred, his skill and experience would have proved equally ineffectual.

"When life has gone, none can restore it save He who gave it," were Dr. Andrewes' words. "He must have been dead before you carried him in here."

Then, taking Hope into his arms, he led her from the room, just as Miss Lucilla entered it in a state of passionate grief, which was a strange contrast to Hope's perfect calmness.

"It was very curious," the doctor said afterwards; "Miss Lucilla, who is always stiff and composed, never roused into self-forgetfulness, was loud in her demonstrations of grief and surprise, wringing her hands and pouring out her feelings; and Hope, who is always so full of life and impulse, and so singularly forgetful, one would say, of herself, was

as quiet as a statue, pale as death itself certainly, but without a word."

"Stunned," said Mrs. Andrewes, the quiet tears stealing very gently down her own cheeks.

"Well, scarcely that," replied the doctor, "for stunned people have not got their senses about them, and she was in full possession of hers after the first moment. It was she who begged me to telegraph at once for Frank—he went back to his regiment by a late train last night—and gave me the letter to read which Ben had picked up from under his master's chair on returning to the dining-room. It was she, too, who advised our not communicating the contents of this letter to her aunt until she should have in some degree recovered from her present state of excitement. I doubt very much myself whether this second blow will not be to her the greater grief of the two, and I own I would rather Frank had the breaking of it to her."

"What second blow?—what letter?" asked Mrs. Andrewes, for she saw by her husband's face that it was something terribly serious. Never before had she seen him look as he looked now.

It had already occurred to her that he had appeared almost more shaken by this sudden event than might have been expected, considering how very often he had himself told her that he believed this would be the end of Mr. Savile's long illness, and that probably at no very distant period. Now she felt sure that there was some further trouble to be told, and as her husband hesitated to tell it, she repeated her question—

"What letter?"

"There can be no harm in telling *you*," he replied, "even though Miss Lucilla has not yet been told, and the telegram sent to Frank, poor fellow! is only hurrying him down to Westbourne to his father's deathbed. He will be prepared

to find himself left an orphan, with the charge of his sister on his hands ; but he will not be prepared to find himself a ruined man, with nothing of his own wherewith to support her."

"A ruined man !" exclaimed Mrs. Andrewes.

"Utterly ruined, I fear," replied the doctor ; "at least so I gather from this letter. It killed poor Savile, though I doubt his having understood much about it beyond the fact which it announces very clearly, and which is all I can fully understand myself. I have the letter with me here. Hope gave it to me, for, unfortunately, Ben gave it to her, and I have promised her I will be with her again before seven o'clock, when Frank may be expected, and that I will tell him the news myself, and he may tell his aunt. I have no patience with that woman."

"You never had," said Mrs. Andrewes, gently ; "but tell me more of this sad business."

"I had not meant to have done so until the rest of the family knew it," he replied. "Besides, you are not so strong that one need give you one shock after another. But it's just like me to have let it out. I never could keep anything from you."

And taking a letter from his pocket-book, he read to her the account of the failure of the business in which Mr. Savile was a partner, through the dishonesty of the cousin in whom, with characteristic carelessness—a carelessness inherited by his son Frank—he had been trusting implicitly for years, never doubting but that all was going well so long as his remittances continued as large as ever.

Now it appeared that the cousin, whom he had left as junior partner, and, unfortunately, sole manager out in India, had gone in for large speculations, on his own account ; these ventures, one after the other, had gone against him, but still they had to be paid for, and to do this he had

accepted bills in the name of the firm. These bills had matured, and had been presented for payment at the bank ; but, alas ! there was nothing to pay them with, and the crash came, the tidings of which had proved thus fatal to Mr. Savile.

"Where is Hope now?" asked Mrs. Andrewes, as the doctor finished reading the letter, and replaced it in his pocket-book.

"Where? Why, at Marylands, of course."

"Yes, but with whom? Where was she when you left her?"

"In her room with Margery. I wanted her to lie down, but she said, and I thought with truth, that she was better up. She has promised me not to go back to the library till I come again, and Margery has promised me that she will look after her. Not that there was any need to make her promise. The girl is devoted to her mistress, and she's a treasure of a girl herself—too good, I sometimes think, for any mistress but Hope."

"May I go to her?" asked Mrs. Andrewes.

"You, my dear? why you have not been out of the house for two months."

"But I could easily go to-day. You said yesterday my cough had left me at last. And I would wrap up so well. I long to see that dear child. I can't help thinking she might like to see me. At all events it would be a comfort to me to feel that I had gone to her, and had shown her some sympathy. Do let me go."

Dr. Andrewes looked first at his watch and then at the weather. Then he rang the bell, and told the servant to order the carriage at once, and to send Priscilla to dress her mistress for a drive.

Hope was sitting in her room surrounded by the flowers which Margery was helping her to arrange—winter flowers

for which she had stripped the greenhouses, that she might have them ready to carry into the library to lay upon her precious dead—when there was a knock and ring at the door. Hope recognized both at once.

"There is the doctor," she said. "Ask them to show him into the drawing-room, Margery. I will come down directly."

And no sooner had she heard the drawing-room door shut, and the retreating footstep of the servant, than she ran down into the drawing-room, to be there received into the arms, not of the stout old doctor, but of his gentle little wife, and softly folded to her breast.

"My dear, dear child," she said, with quiet tears falling from her eyes on Hope's golden head, "I could not keep away from you."

"And you have not been out for months," said Hope, her own tears, almost the first that she had yet shed, springing to her eyes. "I hope it will not make you ill. Indeed, indeed, you ought not to have come; but it was so good of you, and—and I am so glad to have you."

And drawing the arm-chair near the fire, she sat down on a footstool at Mrs. Andrewes' feet, and laying her head on the soft pelisse in which she was enveloped, whilst the old lady placed her hands, almost as soft themselves, upon it, she gave free vent to her tears for the first time since her grief had fallen upon her.

"It was so good of you to come," she repeated, the influence of the loving old lady's presence and unspoken sympathy soothing her very soul.

"I wish I could remain," replied Mrs. Andrewes. "Still more do I wish I could take you home with me. The doctor and I have been talking of it, but I am afraid you could not leave your aunt."

"I'm afraid my aunt does not care much whether I am

here or not, dear Mrs. Andrewes ; she has shut herself up in her room with Perkins, and has not asked for me. But Frank is to be here this evening, and, besides, I would not leave papa, though it is very good of you to wish to have me, and it has comforted me so much to see you. Nothing comforts one like love."

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It certainly had been so in Frank Savile's case. The remembrance of what he once had been dwelt ever in his mind, making him what he now was, the humblest of men, and the most watchful ; so fully conscious of his own innate tendency to yield to temptation and fall into sin, that in the sense of his own weakness, leading him to daily and hourly committal of himself to God, lay the secret of that strength which often surprised even Christian people. He knew where the special danger lay, and made that the point of special vigilance ; but he had gone through the same experience as Ebenezer Brown. The hatred of one sin had led him to the hatred of all sin, and that not so much for the consequences of the thing as for the thing itself.

Truly had his heart been turned into sorrow for sin. Truly had that sorrow been turned into prayer, and that prayer into faith—faith which had resulted in a full obedience to God's law, and a real deep love for the Saviour who had done such great things for him.

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"How could you ever say your friend was not pretty," Frank said to Hope, who had returned to wish her own good-night to him alone, after a sad and yet not unhappy evening spent together by the four young people in the drawing-room, Miss Lucilla's grief not allowing her to join them, "she is the very sweetest girl I ever saw. And as for good looks, she certainly has not got all this yellow stuff, or these bright cheeks which are not bright at all"—and he brought a smile to Hope's wan face by taking her thick knot

1

of golden hair into his hand, and then pinching the cheeks from which every shade of colour had disappeared ; " but her large grey eyes are quite beautiful, and if her features are not very regular they are full of expression. Her face beams with goodness. I can't say how thankful I am that you have her with you. I thought her the nicest girl I had ever seen during those two days I spent at Ashford. Those two days," he added, sadly—" why it was only yesterday that I left, though it seems to me a week ago and more. By the way, have you seen aunt Lucilla ? "

" No," said Hope. " Perkins brought me word that she was going to sleep, and would see me when she woke ; but she is still asleep, and of course I shall not disturb her. "

" I should think not," replied Frank, a little bitterly ; " one would suppose by the way she goes on that she was the greatest sufferer. "

" I'm afraid she *is*, Frank," was Hope's gentle reply. " I am afraid she has the sorrow without the consolation. "

" The sorrow being the loss of the money," said Frank, " which really is to her so much less than to us, for she has her own property, which I fancy will be untouched ; whilst we, Hope—it is well to face the truth—you and I have nothing, absolutely nothing. "

" Except each other, Frank, and God ; is that nothing ? "

CHAPTER XXX.

THE funeral had taken place that morning—just such another bright morning it had been as when, a week ago to-day, Hope had driven her pretty ponies back from the station to Marylands, with her father by her side, listening to all she had to tell him of her and Frank's visit to Ashford, and paying in reality more attention to the sweet face and voice of the speaker than to the words she was speaking.

Now, as then, the sun shone brightly, and though the ground was crisp with a light frost, the birds were singing in the trees surrounding the cemetery, as not forgetting that spring resurrection was near.

The mourners were few, for though the Saviles now had a large circle of acquaintance in Westbourne and its neighbourhood, the number of their intimate friends was small, and only Hope and Frank, Dr. Andrewes, Arthur Gordon, and his sister Elsie, Ben and Margery, and the other household servants (with the one exception of Mrs. Perkins, who had remained in attendance on her mistress) stood round the grave. Several carriages, however, had followed the funeral procession as it slowly made its way to the pretty cemetery two miles out of Westbourne. Amongst these Dr. Andrewes had not failed to observe that of Sir Wilmot Kinnersley. Arthur Gordon had observed it too. Ere long, he said to himself, Hope might be driving in that carriage attended by those liveried servants. It would be a fitting equipage for her. He could well fancy

her at the head of an establishment like Kinnersley Park, doing the honours of the member's house, and gracing it by her appearance as well as by her many gifts and acquirements.

Sir Wilmot's attentions to Miss Hope Savile had been the favourite topic of conversation in Westbourne lately. Little did the good people of Westbourne dream, and very little would the greater number of them have been able to understand such a fact had they even dreamed of it, that only a week ago—on the very day before her going to Ashford—Hope had declined the offer of marriage which Sir Wilmot had made her.

None, not even Frank, had known of this offer, which was, however, repeated only a few months after, when Sir Wilmot was once more disappointed by finding that Hope in her poverty was quite as unwilling to share his riches and his position, as she had been in the days of her own wealth.

"She did not love him," she had told him simply, "though she liked and respected him very much, and was very grateful to him for his affection for her, and very sorry to grieve him in any way. But she did not return his affection, and knew she never should, and she would never marry any one whom she did not truly love."

Once more the doctor sought to win Arthur Gordon's confidence, and once more he communicated the failure of his attempt to his wife.

"I can't make him out much better than I did before," he said to her as they sat together over the fire a few days after Mr. Savile's funeral. "My little talks with him only seem to produce the effect of making me thoroughly uncomfortable, though one comfort is he never seems to be the least offended by them. As far as I can make out, he seems as resolved not to seek to win her now that she is poor as he was when she was rich."

"But Hope will not be poor," said Mrs. Andrewes, "if we carry out our intentions."

"Which of course I have not mentioned to him," said the doctor.

"No, of course not," replied Mrs. Andrewes; "and apparently there would not be any use in doing so. But have you mentioned anything of our wishes to Hope herself?"

"No," said the doctor. "I thought, my dear, you had better speak to her yourself. If it is as fine still to-morrow as it has been these last few days, you might drive to Marylands, and see what you can do about it. Only let her fully understand that if she will make us happy by consenting to our wish, the favour will be all on her part. She will be the benefactor; we shall be the benefited."

Accordingly next day Mrs. Andrewes was once more enveloped in furs and driven to Marylands, where she was shown into the drawing-room—now the sitting-room of the family, since Miss Lucilla had, sorely to Hope's distress, insisted upon the library being kept closed since Mr. Savile's death.

As Mrs. Andrewes entered the room, Miss Lucilla walked out of it, passing her at the door with merely a bow of recognition. The gentle old lady was by no means endowed with her good husband's discerning powers, but it did not require much quickness of perception to see that something had gone wrong with Miss Lucilla Savile. Her heightened colour, and the ill-tempered expression of her face, told Mrs. Andrewes that there had been something amiss before she had entered the room, and perceived the traces of tears on Hope's face, and the trembling tone in which she responded to her greeting. Hope's voice was even a greater tell-tale than her countenance.

In the old days after her first return from France—days

of anxiety almost forgotten now—the doctor used to say he could always tell when there had been any scene with Frank by the nervous tremor in his sister's voice.

It was a great relief to Mrs. Andrewes, and also it made it exceedingly easy for her to fulfil the task which had brought her to Marylands this morning, that Hope entered on the subject at once.

No sooner had she settled her dear old friend in the easy-chair by the fire, and taken the footstool at her side, than she said :

“I am afraid I have vexed aunt Lucilla very much.”

“I am sorry for that, my dear,” said Mrs. Andrewes, fondling the two little hands that had been placed caressingly in hers ; “I am quite sure you did not mean to do so.”

“No, indeed I did not. I should like to tell you all about it, if I may.”

“Certainly you may, my child. I am sure you would not even wish to tell me anything that you ought not.”

“There can be no harm in my telling you this,” replied Hope ; “every one knows, or at least must soon know, that we have lost all our money, and it is about this that I want your advice. I have been asking aunt Lucilla to let me be a governess.”

“A governess ! my child ?” exclaimed the old lady, receiving the idea with almost as much astonishment as Miss Lucilla herself had done, though she looked at the matter from a totally different point of view, and expressed her surprise in a very different tone of voice—a tone as full of sympathy and tenderness as Miss Lucilla's had been of anger and disgust. No thought of the humiliation or contempt to which the family would thus be subjected found its way into the kind old lady's mind. She only thought of Hope's beauty, and the temptations and trials to which she might be subjected in so unprotected a life

as that of a governess, even under the happiest circumstances.

"And your aunt disapproves of such a plan?" she said.

"Yes," said Hope; "but it is not her disapproval that has grieved me. She is so very angry with me for having ever thought of such a thing. She seems to consider it as a personal insult to herself. I cannot understand what aunt Lucilla means; it seems to me that the work of a governess is such a noble one. My only fear had been lest I should be unfit for such a work. It seemed so far above me, as if governesses ought all to be like Mademoiselle Mallerie, so clever and cultivated, and good; or perhaps not all quite like her, because she has had so much experience, and experience can only be gained by years—but like Elsie."

"Your friend is to be a governess one day, is she not?" asked Mrs. Andrewes.

"Yes, as soon as she has finished her own sisters' education. I know she is far more qualified in many ways than I am. I told her so last night when we were talking it over together, and she comforted me by saying that at all events I was better qualified in some ways than she is. I have had such advantages in music and singing."

"And in many other ways," said Mrs. Andrewes. "Did you remind your aunt that your friend was to be a governess?"

"Yes; and she said that it was all very well and suitable for her. She was a poor clergyman's daughter, and had been brought up to it, but it was very different for me, and she would not hear of it."

"So that you must not think of it any more, dear," said the old lady kindly, feeling very thankful inwardly that such an idea should have been thus summarily disposed of, whilst regretting the needless wounding of poor little Hope's feelings which had evidently accompanied the disposal of it.

"I am afraid so," said Hope; "Frank says that aunt

for which she had stripped the greenhouses, that she might have them ready to carry into the library to lay upon her precious dead—when there was a knock and ring at the door. Hope recognized both at once.

"There is the doctor," she said. "Ask them to show him into the drawing-room, Margery. I will come down directly."

And no sooner had she heard the drawing-room door shut, and the retreating footstep of the servant, than she ran down into the drawing-room, to be there received into the arms, not of the stout old doctor, but of his gentle little wife, and softly folded to her breast.

"My dear, dear child," she said, with quiet tears falling from her eyes on Hope's golden head, "I could not keep away from you."

"And you have not been out for months," said Hope, her own tears, almost the first that she had yet shed, springing to her eyes. "I hope it will not make you ill. Indeed, indeed, you ought not to have come; but it was so good of you, and—and I am so glad to have you."

And drawing the arm-chair near the fire, she sat down on a footstool at Mrs. Andrewes' feet, and laying her head on the soft pelisse in which she was enveloped, whilst the old lady placed her hands, almost as soft themselves, upon it, she gave free vent to her tears for the first time since her grief had fallen upon her.

"It was so good of you to come," she repeated, the influence of the loving old lady's presence and unspoken sympathy soothing her very soul.

"I wish I could remain," replied Mrs. Andrewes. "Still more do I wish I could take you home with me. The doctor and I have been talking of it, but I am afraid you could not leave your aunt."

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here or not, dear Mrs. Andrewes ; she has shut herself up in her room with Perkins, and has not asked for me. But Frank is to be here this evening, and, besides, I would not leave papa, though it is very good of you to wish to have me, and it has comforted me so much to see you. Nothing comforts one like love."

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the tears were scarcely dry in them which had been shed over her dear dead father.

Alas ! that such bright hopes should only be raised to be destroyed. How bitterly Mrs. Andrewes reproached herself, and how still more bitterly the kind doctor reproached himself, for ever having been foolish enough to say one word of their plans and wishes to Hope before consulting Miss Lucilla.

That lady would not hear of such a plan. Ever since her brother's death she had been busily engaged in making her own plans ; the one object she had set before herself in doing so, being her own comfort, and especially the maintenance of her own dignity—not in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call her, but in that state of life which she desired to occupy.

Her mind had been greatly relieved at finding that her own little income was larger than she had anticipated. Like her brother, she had no taste or talent for business, and understood little about money except how to spend it. Hers, however, had been honestly cared for by her man of business during the years that she had been living at her brother's expense, and she found herself in possession of a sufficiently good income to enable her to live comfortably, and even with some amount of style, and to go into society with Hope.

"With Hope." Evidently Hope's companionship would be as great an advantage in social life at Wallingford as it had been at Westbourne. Several of her old friends dwelt upon this fact already, and one did so very specially. This was Mrs. Sullivan, who had lately inherited her father's little property of Birchfield, near Wallingford, where in former days Miss Lucilla had only known her as a visitor. She now wrote warmly of the delight it would be to her to have her "little friend and former travelling companion

settled near her." "You must bring her to see me constantly." "My house must be a second home to her." "Hope's charms, and Hope's music will make her welcome everywhere." "You will have a good deal to do as chaperone to your pretty niece as soon as she begins to go out again."

Such remarks constantly occurred in Mrs. Sullivan's letters, and Miss Lucilla did not fail to make mental notes of them, though she was careful not to communicate them to Hope. Life at Wallingford with Hope was likely to be quite a gay life. Without her it might possibly be just the reverse. Frank had been informed of the Andrewes' wish, and had been strongly in favour of its being complied with. "If the old people adopted his sister," he represented to his aunt, "they would probably provide for her after their death, and it was well known how well off they were."

But even this argument failed to produce any effect with Miss Lucilla. Worldly-minded as she was, she did not care for money further than as it conduced to her own comfort and style, and moreover she was thoroughly selfish—selfish to the very core. The consideration of any future benefit to Hope would not have had the smallest weight in the balance with the consideration of a present benefit to herself.

She reconciled the whole matter to her own conscience by saying that she would settle her money by will on Hope, as she had the power of doing—though if she made no will it would go to Frank by an arrangement of her mother's, adding that "if it was enough for her, it would be enough for Hope;" and, letting Frank understand clearly that he had no voice whatever in the matter, she made all her arrangements for removing to Wallingford as speedily as possible.

The only part of the plan which had been so care-

fully and, as they had fondly hoped, so comfortably arranged together by Doctor and Mrs. Andrews, which was destined to be carried out, was that which concerned Margery. It was a sore grief to her to leave her young mistress, but Mrs. Perkins was to accompany Miss Lucilla to Wallingford, and two ladies' maids were out of the question. So it was settled that she should take Priscilla's place as personal attendant on Mrs. Andrewes. Hope and she agreed that no better comfort could have been provided for them in their sorrow at parting, but the comfort to Margery was to be far greater than she had expected.

When Hope came into her room that evening she found Margery waiting for her with such an expression of happiness on her round dimpled face as she had certainly not expected to see there, even under her present circumstances. Evidently she had something further to communicate, and that something was of the happiest nature.

"What is it, Margery?" Hope asked.

"Oh, Miss! Ben has found a place too."

"And a very good place, I can see, Margery," said Hope. "Where is it?"

"The doctor has engaged him, Miss Hope."

"What doctor, Margery? Not Dr. Andrewes? Bartlett would never leave him; and Ben does not mean to go out again as anything but coachman: he told me so to-day as he was driving me back from the Priory House."

And Hope's face did not reflect the brightness that shone upon Margery's, for that drive was the last that she expected to take sitting beside Ben, behind the dear pretty ponies, of which she had grown so fond during the last two years—fonder a great deal than she had ever been of the doctor's good white and bay horses.

"But it *is* Dr. Andrewes, Miss Hope; and Ben *is* going to be coachman. They have settled it all to-day; and the

doctor wished Ben to tell me, and ask me to tell you. He said he knew how glad you would be, and yet he could not make up his mind to speak about it to you himself. The doctor says that there's too much work for his horses now that the practice has grown so large through Mr. Gordon being such a favourite—especially with all the poor people. He says Mr. Gordon is most run off his feet going about from morning till night, and yet that his bill for carriage hire would almost keep another carriage and pair, so he means to set up two carriages and two coachmen, and Ben is to be the second coachman."

She hesitated a moment, and then added, "And oh! Miss Hope, the doctor is going to buy the ponies. He's going to send Mr. Gordon up to Tattersall's on purpose on Thursday. He told Ben he meant to have them, whatever price was put upon them; and that he—Ben, I mean—should always have the driving of them."

The colour, which had heightened in Hope's face with the excitement of Margery's news, had gradually faded out of it altogether.

It would indeed be a great comfort to feel that her dear ponies were in such good hands. She had had many anxious thoughts about them. Indeed, she had not thought it wrong to cast this care also on the Heavenly Father who takes thought even for the sparrows. And she rejoiced to know that the dear things would have such a master as Dr. Andrewes, and would remain under the care of Ben, good faithful Ben. And it would be such happiness for him and Margery to be still together, to have such a new happy home to go to when their present one was broken up, as it would now be soon—so very soon.

But it was a little hard—surely it was just a little hard—that such good times should be in store for others, and she herself not allowed to share in them; and it appeared all

the harder from the fact that the door into this happy new home had seemed to open for her also, to open only to shut again.

Margery did not in the least understand what was passing in her young mistress's mind, not knowing anything of the proposed plan, the realization of which would have made her own happiness so much more perfect ; but the expression of Hope's face troubled her, and checked her in telling the last bit of good news which she had to communicate ; and which she had indeed kept to the last, because it was so much the best of all.

But it had to be told.

"It seems almost selfish to feel happy, Miss Hope," she went on to say, with her round rosy cheeks dyed crimson ; "but I'm sure you know that it isn't because I forget for a moment. Only you know, Miss Hope, Ben and I thought we should have had to wait for years."

She hesitated, and Hope said,

"Wait for what, Margery?"

"To be married, Miss Hope. The doctor says he thinks it better we should marry at once. You see, miss, the new coachman must live in the house, as there's to be no butler now, and the doctor would rather he was married. He will give him the rooms over the arch at the gateway—those nice rooms over the surgery, Miss Hope—there are four of them ; and he says Ben's mother can live with us and take care of them, and answer the surgery bell, while I am with Mrs. Andrewes. It all seems so well arranged, Miss Hope, except——"

"Except what, Margery?" said Hope, with one of her brightest smiles. "I don't think you ought to make any exception. It seems perfect for you both——"

"Oh, Miss Hope, how can anything be perfect for me without you? And, indeed, Ben said that too. You know,

ss, he's so good, he always looks at everything in such a
ht way. I wish I could too. And he said to-day that
doubt this joy would have been just too much, more
n such poor worldly creatures as we are could bear well,
it had not come at the same time as the great grief of
ting with our dear, dear young lady."

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOPE SAVILE stood at her bedroom window in her aunt's house at Wallingford, twisting a small three-cornered note in her hand, and considering what reply she should return to it by the messenger who was to call for her answer in half an hour.

It was the anniversary of her father's death—the first anniversary—and from this fact arose the questionings in Hope's mind as to whether or not she would accept the invitation to spend the day at Birchfield, which this note from her friend Mrs. Sullivan had brought her. If she could have spent the day alone at home, she would not have hesitated as to what reply to send.

For she had awoke that morning with a heart full of memories both sad and sweet, as hearts are wont to be at seasons of such sacred association, and there was a yearning in her soul to be alone somewhere.

But how was this yearning to be satisfied? not at home certainly, for her aunt Lucilla was one of those restless individuals who, not knowing the need of quiet for themselves, cannot understand its ever being a necessity for others; and just now she was in a mood of extra restlessness. After having spent a whole year in struggling to establish and maintain what she was pleased to call her rightful position in Wallingford society, an opportunity of doing so such as she had not before possessed had lately offered itself. Her

own, and her brother's old friend, Colonel Prynne, with his niece Rose, Hope's former companion at Beaumanoir, had just come to Wallingford, where Colonel Prynne had obtained an appointment in the Militia.

"Nothing," Miss Lucilla had declared to Hope, at least twenty times during the last month, could have been more opportune than Colonel Prynne's coming to Wallingford at this particular moment. He was a man of high family, the younger son of an earl, and of large fortune—an unmarried man and very hospitable. She had often heard her brother speak of the splendid way in which he entertained in India, no doubt he would entertain equally well in Wallingford; and she, as the sister of his old friend, and Hope, as the former schoolfellow of his niece, would probably have a stronger claim upon his hospitality than any one in the town or neighbourhood. The acquaintance had rather languished of late, but they must fan it vigorously into fresh existence by immediate attentions to Rose, who was keeping house for him.

Now there was really some prospect of their going more into society, "which would be so good for Hope." Hitherto, Miss Lucilla's expectations in this direction had been somewhat disappointed.

There were not very many of the old families left in Wallingford whom she had known in her youth, and the few who remained, though they respected the memory of both old Mrs. Savile and old Mr. Clifden, and were most ready to show all due friendliness to their daughter and granddaughter, were, for the most part, quiet people mixing but little with the new families who had settled of late years in the town, the population of which had increased tenfold since Miss Lucilla had last lived in it.

If Hope had cared more for society, her aunt constantly averred, they might have known half the people in the

place by this time. Now, however, as she had informed Hope only yesterday, "the year would be over, and it would be simply absurd longer to give her mourning as an excuse for not going into gay society."

It was the luckiest thing possible, therefore, that Colonel Prynne should come to Wallingford at this moment, and also that just at the same time a change of regiments should be about to take place. There would be quite a revival of gaiety in the town to welcome the new regiment, and Miss Lucilla hoped that her niece did not intend to keep aloof from it, when such a grand opportunity for mixing freely in it would be afforded by the use she herself could be as a chaperone to Rose Prynne, and the equal use that Hope might be, if she only chose, as a companion to her.

Poor Hope! The Prynnes coming to Wallingford seemed just the last drop in the disagreeable cup of which she had been drinking during the last year. Her first visit to Rose had shown her how little that young lady was altered. Indeed, whatever change had taken place in her since they parted at Beaumanoir had been very much for the worse. Even Mademoiselle Mallerie, true educator that Mrs. Savile had pronounced her to be, and that she truly was, could not work that change in her pupils which can be wrought by one influence alone, and that not of this earth; she had done all for Rose that could have been done, without that change of will and object which God alone can effect. And now that the restraints of school life and discipline were once more removed, Rose, having persistently refused to give her heart where Hope and Elsie had given theirs, to the Saviour who had redeemed them, and whose soldiers and servants they were bound to be by their baptismal vow, had entered with all her mind—we cannot say with all her heart, for there is little heart in such a service, and no soul—but with whatever power of mind she possessed, and with all the

strength of a peculiarly strong will, into the service of self and the world ; or we might say of self alone, for she only cared for the world, in so far as it contributed to her own selfish profit or pleasure.

We can scarcely wonder therefore that Hope's heart sank within her at the prospect of having this girl's companionship once more forced upon her, and that she shrank from the idea of an afternoon spent in her society on this day of specially sad and sacred remembrances.

Going to Birchfield would at all events secure a solitary walk there, and a quiet drive back in the evening in Mrs. Sullivan's carriage ; and Mrs. Sullivan was never trying or gossiping, but always kind and motherly and sympathizing.

So a note was written to accept her friend's invitation to luncheon, and very thankful Hope felt that the said note was already in Mrs. Sullivan's house when her aunt came to her room an hour later to tell her that she certainly should go to see the Prynnes that afternoon, as she found they would be leaving again next day to spend a month in London on furnishing business.

To Hope's relief, Miss Lucilla expressed no annoyance at hearing that her niece had accepted an invitation to spend the day at Birchfield, and could not therefore accompany her. It was just as well perhaps, she said to herself, that Hope should not be with her on the occasion of this visit. Her absence would enable her to say a good deal about her niece which she had not been able to say in her presence—"how anxious she was that her spirits should be cheered by going out a great deal, now that her mourning would no longer prevent her going into society ; how great a favourite she had been at Westbourne ; how beautifully she played and sang ; what a pleasure it would be to herself if Rose and she became companions, as indeed they really ought to do, after having been schoolfellows in France ;

how gladly she would extend her chaperonage to Rose, and take her with Hope into society," &c.

Miss Lucilla went out of her niece's room in quite a good temper, leaving Hope deep in the thoughts which her entrance had interrupted, as she returned to the open window, and the flowers there which she had cherished all through the winter, and which always seemed to speak to her of other and happier days, and of friends from whom she was separated—Mrs. Gordon and dear old Mrs. Andrewes more than anything else.

A change had passed over Hope since last we saw her, a change which all noticed, and which some regretted, although those who most regretted it were not those who loved her best.

"Yes, she is very much altered," her friend Elsie had replied on her return from her first visit to Hope in her new home, in answer to Mrs. Gordon's inquiry, "though it is a change difficult to express. She was such a child at Beau-manoir, much more of a child than I was; and at West-bourne she was a much merrier, more lively girl than ever I could be. And now she is a woman, mother, far more of a woman than I am."

It was quite true. The sorrows she had known, the misfortunes she had gone through, and the disappointments she had tasted, had given her a strength of character and a composure of manner which seemed surprising to those who had only known her hitherto in the days of her light-hearted buoyancy.

And yet, with the womanhood which had come upon her thus early, Hope retained much more of her girlishness, much more even of her childishness than Elsie imagined. She had grown many years older during her one year's stay at Wallingford, but though she had not the same brightness of spirits, her youthful buoyancy and life were not lost,

but only over-shadowed ; lying concealed for a time, but ready to gush forth again bright and strong as ever, when the shadows should pass and reviving influences fall once more. Her sorrows had chastened and subdued, but not saddened her. No one would ever dream of calling Hope Savile sad.

She was the life and the sunshine even of her aunt Lucilla's house, where her presence cast a brightness all around, for she lived in the light of her Saviour's love, and this love, shining clearly in her heart, was reflected not only in her own life, but it cast its reflection on other hearts and lives.

The servants at Savile Cottage said one to another that "Miss Hope was an angel." How often had not the servants at Marylands said those same words ; and how much more truth was there not in them than they themselves imagined ! Many such angels are to be found in other homes, living the life of angels amongst men, excelling in strength, doing the commandments of the Lord, hearkening unto His Word, communicating the will of God to others, helping to carry out His purposes on earth, singing His praises with the morning stars, and shouting for joy with the sons of God ; rejoicing with the angels over the repenting sinner, and caring as the angels do for every one of God's saints.

Such an angel's life did Hope live on earth, ministering to one and all, making the dull house bright by her sweet content, and purifying by the unconscious subtle influence of her innocence and heaven inspired sympathy the atmosphere in which she dwelt, and from which her very presence served to exorcise the worldliness.

But though Hope may have seemed as an angel to others, and her life in so many points resembled that which the angels live, she was no angel, but only a weak, erring, tempted child of earth, as none knew better than herself,

yet as she was about to realise as she had never realised it before.

The walk to Birchfield was a pleasant one, lying along the river-side, where, altered as everything at Wallingford was since those early days, Hope could still remember swimming boats with Frank, when there were no eyes to watch them, save those of the birds in the tall trees which had been long ago cut down to make room for factories and warehouses. The quiet country beauty of the river was gone, but it was picturesque still, and Hope liked it, and had made many friends amongst the bargemen and their families. As she went her way to-day, many a hat was raised, and many a curtsy dropped, and many a little face lifted smilingly to hers.

Hope returned the bows and the smiles with such pleasant grateful recognition as won for her many a look and word of admiration and gratitude ; yet though she trod so lightly and smiled so sweetly, she had at heart a somewhat disturbed feeling, not brought there only by the remembrance of her loss and sorrow, but also by the disturbing—a slight disturbing perhaps—of that inward peace which arises from a will entirely subjected to God's will, and from the deep consciousness of God's will being always, in small things as well as great, not only wisdom, but love.

Hope had learned many lessons in God's school during the years of her young life, and especially during the last year ; but she often said to herself afterwards that she had been allowed to go to Wallingford that day to learn two lessons as she had never yet learned them. One was the lesson of God's providence, His ever-watchful, all-pervading, sometimes painful and mysterious, but always righteous, and always loving providence, bringing every word of His to pass, overruling every design that man may form contrary to His will, determining every event in the lives of His

children, disposing the minutest matters concerning them, preserving their feet, directing their way and making all things finally to work together for their good—even such untoward things as their own mistakes, weaknesses, sins, and backslidings, and the temptations and trials and snares both of the visible and invisible world.

This lesson Hope learned now, better even than she had learned it at Ashford by means of Frank's accident, from the experiences which resulted from that day's visit to Birchfield—a visit about which she had felt somewhat self-willed, for, as she remembered afterwards, she had made up her mind to go. Even if her aunt had urged her own wishes in a contrary direction, her intention was to go that day to Birchfield.

She never afterwards recalled that day—and its having been the anniversary of her father's funeral made it a marked day—without realising the fact which we are so ready to recognize as a fact, yet so slow in bringing to bear upon the daily and hourly practice of our lives, that none can tell what lasting results may arise from what seems at the time such a very trifling matter.

And the other lesson was of the power of temptation. Hope knew something of this power—what Christian does not? She had often endured it, and resisted it, and she had also often failed to resist it, and been overcome by it. In various ways, and under various circumstances, she had, as all have, been in heaviness through manifold temptations; and she had learned—well was it for her that she had—to watch against temptation, to pray against it, to flee from it, and to look to Him who knows how to deliver His children out of it, and has given them His own Word that the temptation shall never go beyond what they are able to bear.

Yet Hope also often told herself afterwards, that she was

allowed to go to Birchfield that day in order that by the power of temptation her own heart might be tried and tested, and brought into such intimate sympathy with other tempted hearts, that it should be able to vibrate in unison with theirs, and that with the strength with which she had herself been strengthened in past days she should be enabled in future days to strengthen others.

On entering her friend's drawing-room she was greeted by Mrs. Sullivan with even more than her usual warmth.

"I was so afraid you might not come," she said—for she too had remembered what day it was. "You must not think I have been deceiving you, if I confess I did not tell you all the truth in my little hurried note. I said I particularly wanted you to come—and that is quite true ; but I did not add why, for you are such a funny child, Hope, I can scarcely ever get you to meet any one here."

"And have you company?" asked Hope, in an alarmed and somewhat injured tone.

"Not company, dear, only the Johnstones. They have invited themselves to spend the afternoon here, that they may show my camellias to a friend who is with them. I was not feeling well, and I did so greatly want my little Hope to help me to entertain them. You like the Johnstones."

The Johnstones were the family of the merchant who had bought what had once been her grandfather's property, and who lived in a substantial mansion close to Savile Cottage, the old house in the town having been converted into a factory. Consequently, being almost opposite neighbours to Miss Lucilla, Hope had seen more of them than of almost any other of the Wallingford people since they had been in the place.

Mrs. Johnstone was a kind-hearted, comfortable woman, and the daughters good-natured and friendly, but heavy and

commonplace. Hope expressed her readiness to help in entertaining them, though disappointed at finding she was not to be alone with Mrs. Sullivan, and sincerely hoping that they would not stay long after luncheon.

"Mrs. and the Miss Johnstones and Mr. Raymond," announced the footman; and self-possessed as Mrs. Sullivan and Hope were, both started slightly at the name, and Mrs. Sullivan exchanged a rapid glance with Hope, as she went forward to meet the ladies who had entered and to be introduced by them to their friend—Mr. Victor Raymond.

"I do not think we need an introduction," said Mrs. Sullivan. "Nor," she added, "do I need to introduce Mr. Raymond to my friend, Miss Savile."

"No indeed," exclaimed Victor; "this is truly an unexpected pleasure—I had no idea you were in this part of the world."

And the Miss Johnstones' friend shook hands with Hope with such warmth, and with such an expression of real delight on his handsome face and in his expressive eyes, that those young ladies opened theirs wider than Mrs. Sullivan would have believed possible, and gazed at him with more animation in their dull countenances than she could have supposed them capable of exhibiting.

They went in to luncheon, and Victor sat next to Hope. She no longer felt any wish that Mrs. Sullivan's guests should take their departure directly after the meal was finished.

The afternoon was singularly fine, and after they had visited the hot-houses, a walk was proposed in the grounds.

Victor walked with Hope, and Mrs. Sullivan thought what a handsome couple they were, and built up a little castle in the air founded on her remembrance of what she had seen at the railway station at Francheville. She knew Hope too well now for any doubtful or uncomfortable feel-

ings to mingle themselves in the motherly interest with which she watched her and this young man take turn after turn in the chestnut walk at the end of the shrubbery, too deep in conversation to observe themselves that they were being observed by others.

What could they be talking about which was evidently a subject of such interest to both?

Neither Mrs. Sullivan or the Johnstones dreamed that they were talking of Victor's dead sister Mary, as Hope, with earnest face, and tears in her eyes, asked question after question which Victor answered in detail, with responsive feeling in his voice, and tears of sympathy in his own eyes. And yet, at other times, and to other people, Victor could talk very coolly of Mary, not even feeling much sorrow now for an event which had affected him at the time certainly, but the remembrance of which had been almost effaced from his mind during the last year.

But when Hope spoke so feelingly of what his sister's loss must have been to his father, he, we must not say pretended to realise, but actually did seem so deeply to realise the greatness of that loss, and the suffering which it must have caused his father, that, as he spoke of it, Hope was impressed with the feeling of his great filial affection and true sympathy for Mr. Raymond, for whom she herself had always felt so much.

And when Hope, speaking as she was wont to do out of the fulness of her heart, of that hope beyond the grave which had been the great comfort of Mary's father and widowed husband, Victor responded to this feeling with such warmth as to leave the conviction on Hope's mind that it had been his consolation also. And this led her to speak more freely of religious things than she could often do, except with intimate friends. And Victor was all interest, all sympathy. Hope felt convinced that he thought and felt quite as

strongly as she did herself. Evidently it was a pleasure to him to talk of such subjects. And so it was when the conversation was being carried on with a lovely girl like Hope, and when he could see that to talk and to hear of such things as these brought a deeper feeling into her sweet voice and a more beautiful expression into her eyes than could be inspired by any other subject.

On their return to the house, Mrs. Sullivan's new piano became the subject of conversation, and Miss Johnstone mentioning that Mr. Raymond was a great musician, he consented to try it, and played and sang most beautifully. Then Hope was persuaded to play and sing too, and then they played and sang together—how Hope ever found courage to do so was a mystery she could not have explained. The music had carried her out of herself, and she had scarcely known what she was doing until, after singing with him one of the same old duetts which they had sung together at Francheville, he said to her, as she rose from the piano—

“I have not enjoyed anything so much since we sang that same song at Francheville.”

It was nearly six o'clock before the Johnstones' carriage was ordered, and they took their departure, Victor Raymond saying as he did so that he should give himself the pleasure of calling next day, and he hoped he might also be allowed to call on Miss Savile, and be introduced to her aunt.

By this time he had discovered that she was living at Wallingford; and was feeling not a little annoyed with his step-mother and her sister for never having informed him of the fact, with which he had learned from Hope that they were perfectly acquainted, since she and Mademoiselle Mallerie had been in constant correspondence. He had not told her, it was true, that he meant to go to Wallingford on the occasion of this visit to England. Indeed, he had not intended going there, but business had decided him to

do so, and now how thankful he was for it, since it had given him this opportunity of renewing his friendship with Hope Savile. "Thankful," yes, that was the word he used in speaking to himself of this renewal of friendship; without considering for what he was thus thankful, nor to whom. Nor did he pause to reflect what was to be the character of this friendship, nor to what it was to lead. It was not Victor Raymond's way to consider anything beyond his own personal pleasure, the gratification of his present impulse, whatever that might be. The interest which Hope's society afforded him, his intense delight in her beauty, the immense pleasure inspired by her music, the charm of her conversation, the fascination of her voice and manner—that was all that he thought about. The future never entered his mind, as regarded Hope.

Neither did it enter Hope's mind, only as Victor Raymond prolonged his stay at Wallingford from a week to a fortnight, and from a fortnight to three weeks, she became a different girl. Her colour had returned, her spirits also. She had quite taken up her music again, singing and playing with all her old enjoyment; reading and sketching, and finding all her former interest in these pursuits return under the reviving influence of Victor Raymond's sympathy and admiration. Mrs. Sullivan looked on with almost motherly interest, delighted to see her favourite Hope so happy, and feeling confident that this happiness would lead to greater.

She even discussed the matter with kind Mrs. Johnstone, and her good-natured daughters.

"There was no doubt," they all agreed, "that the young people understood each other, and a very good thing it was for Hope that they should do so. She could not have a very happy life with that discontented, complaining aunt, who evidently did not in the least appreciate her; and though they did not suppose that Mr. Raymond had much

private means, his father's business, in which he had lately become a partner, was a good one, and no doubt they would have quite enough to live upon."

Thus did Hope's friends settle her affairs for her, whilst she herself, all unconscious of what was being thought and said, gave herself up to the delight of Victor Raymond's society, and Miss Lucilla Savile looked on with indifference.

She was at all times singularly unsuspicious of everything that did not immediately concern herself, as very selfish people often are, and just at this moment her time and thoughts were absorbed in the renewal of her acquaintance with Colonel Prynne and his niece, and in forming various plans for doing them honour and rendering herself useful to them. She felt quite thankful that they would not be returning until after this young Mr Raymond had left, for then Hope would be free to give her full attention to them. And this was all the thought she gave to Mr. Raymond, beyond saying one day that he was a very agreeable young man ; for Victor was as deferential and attentive to her as he used to be to Mademoiselle Mallerie and her mother, and attention was never lost upon Miss Lucilla.

Thus passed the three weeks to which Victor Raymond's visit had been extended, and then came a letter from his father summoning him back to France at a day's notice, on important business ; and it was only when he had left—after a hurried good-bye, the only part of which Hope seemed to understand was that he would soon be coming back—that she realised that she had been living in a dream.

Nor did she awake from this dream at once. Whether or not she might have roused herself to do so by an effort of will is another question. If so that effort was not made. The dream was a pleasant one, and she allowed herself to remain under its influence, until one day she was startled into a very sudden and a very thorough awakening.

About ten days after Victor Raymond had left, a letter came for her from Mademoiselle Mallerie. At other times she would have read it at the breakfast table, but she could not have done so with the consciousness that Victor was at Francheville, and it might contain some news of him, of whom she had not heard a word since he left, so she waited until breakfast was over and carried it into her own room to read quietly there. It was a long letter, as Mademoiselle's always were, and full of details of the various doings of the Francheville nephews and nieces. Hope was so truly interested in them that Mademoiselle always felt she could not please her better than by telling her every scrap of news she had to give about them.

But to-day Hope's eye ran cursorily over the first two sheets which described the concert at which Cécile's successful performance of one of Beethoven's sonatas had secured for her the first prize, and the account of little Paul's going to a Lycée, and his feelings and remarks thereon—until she caught sight of Victor's name, and then she read once, twice, three times, the following sentence :

“ Victor is here for a fortnight—at Francheville I mean. He tells us he saw you at Wallingford, and that he hopes to do so again, for he means to pay another visit to England before his marriage, which is not now to take place till the winter. His fiancée, Mary Andrews, was here for some time early in the year, and we all liked her very much—a truly good girl, and very handsome, as one would expect a fiancée of Victor's to be.”

That was all that Hope understood of that letter, though she read the whole—the only sentence that remained in her mind.

She tore the letter into small pieces at once, and threw it into the waste paper basket, though why she did so she could scarcely herself have told.

And then she went straight out into the garden to ask the gardener for the seeds she had promised to send to Mrs. Sullivan, and despatched the boy with them to Birchfield, with a note accepting an invitation from that lady to dine there that evening.

Then she went round her district, throwing herself with even more than usual interest into everything that any one of her poor people had to say, and came back to luncheon, looking so tired that even Miss Lucilla remarked upon it. Yet directly after luncheon she sat down to the piano, and practised the songs she meant to sing that evening at Birchfield. The two or three that lay uppermost on her pile of music were those she had sung most with Victor. She took them up, feeling disposed for a moment to subject them to the same treatment to which she had subjected Mademoiselle Mallerie's letter, but after an instant's hesitation she put them at the very bottom of the pile of songs and pieces of music. Then, once more changing her mind, with equal suddenness she took them out again, practised them over, and put them into her music-case to sing them that night at Birchfield.

Which she did most beautifully.

As she practised them in the afternoon it had been somewhat difficult to keep her voice steady, especially at certain bars and certain words, and more than once tears had risen to her eyes, and altogether choked her voice—tears, however, that were not of sorrow.

But when she sang them that night in Mrs Sullivan's drawing-room her voice was clear and strong.

They reminded others besides Hope of Victor Raymond, and some one asked if there had been any news of him.

"Yes," said Hope, "I have heard from his aunt. He is with his father at Francheville for a fortnight before going back to Lyons."

It rose to her mind to say, "He will be returning to Wallingford soon. He means to pay one more visit to England before his marriage."

Her courage would not have failed her. She could have said it quite naturally and calmly, but she refrained. She had *not* known of his engagement when he was at Wallingford—how differently would she have thought of him and felt towards him if she had. To speak of it thus would lead others to imagine perhaps that she had, and might partake, in however small a degree, of the nature of deceit.

So she said no more than truth seemed to require from her, and after that she never mentioned his name again, except in reply to a remark from some one else. But she thought a great deal of him—yet more of herself, of whom she was in the habit of thinking so little—and most of all of Mary Andrews—poor Mary Andrews! How she pitied her—far more than she pitied herself; for though she had had a wound, and a sharp wound, it was not a heart-wound; or if it were, it had only touched the surface of that little heart of hers. It had not gone down deep, as Hope realised herself even at this moment when it was so recent, and its smart was sorest—just sore enough to make her realise what it might have been.

But Mary Andrews—such a familiar name as it seemed to her. She dwelt on it in her mind, repeating it often to herself, "Mary"—the same name as her former friend at Francheville—Victor's own dear sister. And "Andrews"—the same as her dear doctor, though differently spelt. She was not likely to be unable to remember in future days who Victor Raymond had married.

Could he love her? The question rose in her mind over and over again, and each time that it did so she could only answer it by the remembrance of a hundred things Victor had said to herself—a hundred things he had done for her—

which she could not have believed it possible that any man who had been, not only in love with a girl, but actually engaged to her, could by any possibility have done and said to any other girl save her.

And then Hope came back to an old resolution which she had made in bygone days, before she had discovered how changed (as she had fondly imagined) Victor Raymond was, how much more religious he had become, how good and grave ; and this resolution was to put him again out of her mind altogether.

Only it would be, she thought, the greatest possible satisfaction to see him once more. She should so much like to know the full particulars of this engagement, the truth of which she would not have credited had it come from any other source. And also she so greatly longed to let Victor see that she had *not* cared for him ; that she had not been beguiled into the belief that he cared for her, in spite of all he had said and done which might so easily have led her to imagine that he did.

She would think no more of him. She would return to all her former occupations and interests with greater zeal than ever. She would be in all respects just what she had been before Victor Raymond had once more crossed her path and troubled it. Only she greatly desired to see him just once again.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THREE months had passed quietly away without bringing any fresh change or chance to Hope Savile—the three quietest months she had yet spent at Wallingford, and by far the happiest.

As so often happens, that which she had so much dreaded had proved personally a source of real comfort to her. She had never enjoyed any true liberty at Wallingford until the Prynnes' arrival there.

The pleasure of their society, the constant excitement which it kept up in her aunt Lucilla's mind and life, had set her free from that wearisome attendance on her in her ceaseless paying of visits and receiving of visits which had been so distasteful to Hope, trying her health and spirits far more than they could have been tried by any amount of actual work in which her heart and brain would have taken part.

Miss Lucilla had seemed of late weeks to have forgotten her former convictions of the absolute necessity that duty laid upon her to take her niece into society, "for the dear girl's good, to cheer her spirits and restore her buoyancy."

In chaperoning Miss Prynnne to balls and parties, thus "returning the kindness which her uncle had shown to her brother in former years," Miss Lucilla had found an equally strong and far more satisfactory reason for making it her duty to share in the Wallingford gaieties, and Hope was left

in peace to practise "her duty to society" in ways which reconciled themselves better to her own conscience, and which were also, it must be confessed, more congenial to her own tastes. Not that Hope had anything of the hermit in her. On the contrary she was, both by nature and cultivation, especially qualified to enjoy and to adorn society. She had done so at Westbourne, and she would have been prepared to do so also at Wallingford. But to live for the world, to reckon as her red-letter days those in which she was invited to this or that "party of distinction," to furnish her house, and arrange her table, and apportion her time with a view to the amount of worldly admiration and envy which such arrangements might secure for her from people whom she did not respect, this—which was Miss Lucilla's plan of life—was not only distasteful, but positively painful to Hope.

Not so with Miss Prynne. She and Miss Savile suited each other wonderfully; so well that at the end of their first three months' sojourn at Wallingford she had constituted herself Miss Lucilla's chosen companion, and Hope had been left free to a great extent to choose her own friends.

With the exception of Mrs. Sullivan, whom she loved truly, and the Johnstones, whom she liked very much, these friends were chiefly amongst the poor. She had become a district visitor, and her district was her great delight, though it did not bring her into as much intercourse with her clergyman as the districts at Ashford brought the visitors there into intercourse with Mr. Gordon.

The rector of Wallingford was a very old man, almost past his work in that large parish, but too poor to give it up as he sometimes longed to do; and therefore, because her people were so dependent on her, Hope worked all the harder amongst them. She gave them her time, her thoughts, and her prayers, and though of silver and gold she

had now but little to give, this lack was supplied by Mrs. Sullivan, who scarcely ever allowed Hope to conclude one of her frequent visits to Birchfield without taking out her "poor people's purse" as she called it, saying—

"Now who wants shoes, or blankets, or coals to-day? I can't tell you, Hope, what a relief it is to my mind to have found a reliable almoner at last, for I have neither strength nor talent for visiting amongst the poor myself, and yet it is horrible to have money and not to do any good with it. You are to me what I should have liked my Eugénie to have been. You do the good for me which I could never have done for myself."

Not once since Victor Raymond had left had Hope mentioned his name to any one, but this fact had never struck Mrs. Sullivan. She herself had mentioned him frequently, but she was too thorough a lady ever to have done so with even the slightest allusion to Hope, and for this she felt increasingly thankful as time passed and they neither saw nor heard anything further of him.

At length Mrs. Johnstone and her daughters dismissed this oft-discussed subject from their minds altogether, having come comfortably to the conclusion that after all they had evidently been mistaken, and Hope's and Victor Raymond's apparently warm friendship must have been only that of old acquaintance.

But Mrs. Sullivan did not think so. She knew Hope better than they did. She remembered the expression of her face on that night when she met and parted from Victor at the railway station; and though she could not guess what was the state of things between them, and being, as we have said, a thorough lady, made no attempt to discover, she fully believed that Victor Raymond had been something more to Hope Savile in the past than an ordinary friend, and she sincerely hoped that he would be something still nearer to

er in the future; so little do the best and wisest friends sometimes know what is for the true interests of those whom they love and would fain see happy.

Therefore it was that Mrs. Sullivan was roused into quite unusual excitement one bright June morning when, as she sat at her embroidery work in her morning room, Miss Johnstone appeared at the open glass door with a letter in her hand, and said—

“Well, our hero has turned up at last. Mother has had his letter from Mr. Raymond this morning, asking her if we can take him in for a few days. I have brought it over for you to read. He proposes to come on Saturday to stay till Monday. I wonder what Hope will say, or if she knows.”

“I wonder,” replied Mrs. Sullivan, as she read through the short note and returned it to Miss Johnstone, evidently quite as much interested in its news as that young lady herself—much more truly interested indeed.

“Hope will be here herself this afternoon,” she said. “I had a note from her too this morning, fixing this as the most convenient day for coming to help me with my roses, if it should be fine.”

“Then she is sure to come,” said Miss Johnstone. “Perhaps our news will be no news to her. She may know all about Mr. Raymond’s plans a great deal better than we do.”

“Perhaps,” said Mrs. Sullivan, adding to herself, “most probably.”

But in this supposition she was entirely mistaken.

Hope had indeed received a letter by that morning’s post which at this moment was causing her some anxious thought, but it had nothing whatever to do with Victor Raymond.

The letter was from Doctor Andrewes, who wrote seldom—never, indeed, except when he had something particular to say.

“I have not been feeling easy about Mrs. Andrewes for

some weeks," he wrote, "and I should be very glad if you could arrange to spend a little time with us as soon as possible. I feel sure that nothing would do her so much good as a visit from you. Indeed, she said the other day that what she longed for most was a sight of her little Hope. So come as soon as you can, like a dear good child. Not that there is any need to hasten your visit; she is not positively ill, only weak and somewhat depressed, and suffering more than usual from her palpitations. A week hence, however, will be quite time enough if you have any engagements which would make it inconvenient to come earlier; only we shall be glad to have our little woman as soon as possible."

Thus wrote the doctor, and after considering the matter, Hope came to the conclusion that she would go to Westbourne on Friday.

Her inclination would have led her to go at once, but she had promised to spend the afternoon at Birchfield. Moreover, it would be better to give her friends at the Priory-house time to make their arrangements for receiving her, and a more hurried arrival might only alarm Mrs. Andrewes, leading her to think that the doctor was more uneasy about her than he really was. But she would not delay longer than Friday, if her aunt had no objection to her going then, which Miss Lucilla had not.

Indeed, Hope felt a little wounded at the ready assent which was accorded to the proposal.

"Of course, of course, the change will do you good, and Miss Prynne can have your room. Her uncle was saying yesterday he was going away for a few days on business, and it will be a good opportunity for having her here. It will be very convenient."

After saying which Miss Lucilla made no further allusion to the subject of Mrs. Andrewes' failure of strength, or of

Hope's possible uneasiness about her, but thought and talked all through luncheon of the needful arrangements for Miss Prynne's comfort, and the best manner of entertaining her during the Colonel's absence.

From Mrs. Sullivan Hope felt sure of receiving full sympathy, for though she had never seen either Doctor or Mrs. Andrewes, she had heard much of Hope's old friends, to whom she owed so much, and whom she loved so dearly, and in all that interested Hope Mrs. Sullivan took interest for Hope's sake.

Yet Hope was surprised at the amount of sympathy and interest which came into her friend's face and eyes in response to the first remark which she made on her arrival that afternoon.

"I have a piece of news for you, Mrs. Sullivan," she said.

"Indeed, dear!" was the discreet reply.

"I have had a letter this morning, and I am going away on Friday."

"A letter, dear? May I ask from whom, and where you are going?"

"Yes, of course," said Hope, wondering somewhat at Mrs. Sullivan's peculiar manner, which she could not quite make out. "I have brought the letter for you to see. I want your opinion about it, indeed. It has troubled me a good deal."

Mrs. Sullivan took the letter from Hope's hand, and again Hope was struck with something strange in her look, and with the sort of surprise that came over her face as she read Doctor Andrewes' note.

"What do you think of it?" Hope asked. "It seems to me he is anxious, more anxious than he likes to allow; but then he is always ready to be alarmed about Mrs. Andrewes, he is so devoted to her. Anyhow, I shall go on Friday."

"On Friday," repeated Mrs. Sullivan.

And then, looking Hope in the face, she added—

"There does not seem any immediate hurry—any hurry at all, indeed—and I had been wanting so much to make some plan for your coming to me on that very day; I thought you might have spent a few days here with me. The Johnstones are expecting Mr. Raymond on Saturday. You had not heard of it?"

Hope's clear, truthful eyes returned Mrs. Sullivan's steadfast look, though—as her friend did not fail to remark—there was a faint deepening of the colour in her cheek, and the slightest possible tremor in her voice as she answered,

"No; how should I?"

"You are intimate with his family," said Mrs. Sullivan, somewhat apologetically.

"They write very seldom; besides," she added, "they seldom mention Mr. Victor Raymond, or know anything of his movements."

By this time she had fully recovered her self-possession, and when Mrs. Sullivan again pressed her to delay going to Westbourne, "if only until Monday," she was ready with her reply.

"I have written to say that I will come on Friday. They will be expecting me. I should not like to disappoint them."

In her heart she added, "I had better go, I had much better go. It seems ordered for me that I should go. This is surely no chance."

But all the way home—and somehow she had made her visit to Mrs. Sullivan much shorter that afternoon than she had any intention of doing, and had accomplished her work with the roses with wonderful rapidity—she kept thinking, and thinking, and thinking.

It would have been better if she had not; if, instead of

turning over and over in her mind the conjectures and possibilities that Mrs. Sullivan's unexpected news had suggested in it, she had lifted up her heart in one short prayer to God for that single eye which would enable her clearly to perceive what was His will, and that single heart which would enable her fully to obey it.

After that she might safely and happily have left all the rest to God's providence, confident that He would not withhold from His trusting servant that direction which is our only safety in circumstances of doubtful rectitude, when one false step may lead to consequences which no after repentance or sorrow can ever take altogether out of our lives, however freely and fully the error may have been forgiven.

She had so often longed to see Victor again, just for a day, or even an hour.

Why, she scarcely knew, but chiefly, she thought, because she wanted to show him that she did not care for him.

Little things came back to her mind—things which he had said to her, and which she now regretted ever having allowed him to say—as she certainly never would have done had she had the slightest suspicion of what she now knew to be true. She caught herself wondering whether Victor thought her a flirt—of all things the most hateful to her—and then longing to show him she was not.

But it would be waste of time to repeat the many thoughts that Hope herself recognized afterwards it had been worse than waste of time to indulge in, yet which occupied her all that evening, and kept her awake half through the night.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOPE had scarcely finished breakfast next morning when Miss Johnstone came in, apologizing for such an early visit, and saying that they wished her to know at once that her father had written by the late post last night to beg Mr. Raymond to come to them on Friday instead of Saturday.

"Papa must leave for London on Saturday morning," she said, "and he particularly wishes to see Mr. Raymond on business. We feel sure he will come, for papa says the business is really important, and Mr. Raymond knows it is. It is most convenient for us, for now we can have Saturday free for our picnic to Losely woods. As papa will be away there will be no poring over papers in the office all the morning. We can start as soon after breakfast as we choose. I am going over to Birchfield to arrange all about it with Mrs. Sullivan, only I wanted to come in here first to see you. Mrs. Sullivan's heart was so set on your coming with us, and surely you can stay one day. Papa has asked Mr. Raymond to come by the first train on Friday, so that we *could* go to Losely that afternoon, but Saturday would give us a longer day. Only let me tell Mrs. Sullivan that you will come with us."

But Hope declared it to be impossible.

Miss Johnstone took her departure therefore, and scarcely had she gone when a telegram arrived from Dr. Andrewes, startling Hope very much until she read its contents.

"Delighted to receive yours. Better delay your arrival to Saturday. Away in consultation on Friday."

So here was "Providence" coming to meet her wishes. She had desired to see Victor once more—only just once—and the way had been made clear. He had intended to arrive on Saturday and she had intended to leave on Friday.

But Mr. Johnstone had written to beg him to hasten his coming, and Doctor Andrewes had postponed her going.

There would be a chance of her meeting Victor after all, and that by no arrangement of her own. It certainly seemed a providence. Hope believed that it was, not quite remembering at the moment how easy it is in times of mental excitement to mistake the wish of our own heart for the will of God.

The work of faith, and that consecration of will which is the result of faith, was truly begun in Hope's soul, but it was by no means completed, and Satan and her own heart were in league together, as they ever are and ever will be, to hinder its progress by all means in their power. Therefore had it been that all sorts of troublesome questionings and imaginings had been sweeping through her mind all these hours, destroying that interior quietude which it is so absolutely necessary to maintain within the soul, if we desire to hear the still small voice of God's Holy Spirit speaking to us there.

Now, a different set of thoughts, equally disturbing in character, took possession of her mind. She felt sure she should see Victor. It almost seemed to her as though his coming was the reward of the resolution she had made, and to which she still would have adhered, not to take a single step towards seeing him, never to put herself in his way again.

Having come to this conclusion, she went about the house with a lighter step, did not feel the same irritability with her aunt, which had rendered her petty gossiping

almost unbearable the evening before; and when Mrs. Sullivan called in the afternoon, that kind woman's heart was warmed into fresh expectations as she saw how bright Hope looked.

She had come to say that, since Hope would not delay her going and had not time to go to Losely on Friday, they had decided to leave the picnic, as fixed, for Saturday, and the Johnstones had promised to spend Friday evening with her at Birchfield and bring Mr. Raymond. Of course Hope could come too. She could get all her packing done early, and they would have a pleasant musical evening.

But Hope refused her invitation steadily. She would really be very busy, she said, colouring deeply. What else could she say? Yet in her heart she felt that this was not her true reason; and to Hope's honest soul anything except "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" always seemed like falsehood.

But though she would not consent to put herself into Victor's way, she felt pretty sure that Victor could not be so near without coming into hers. He could scarcely spend a day and night at Mrs. Johnstone's without meeting her somehow and somewhere, even if he did not seek a meeting, as she felt pretty sure he would do when he found that she was leaving Wallingford on the following day.

So she made up her mind as to the exact manner in which she would meet him, going over and over again in thought the very words which she so specially desired to say to him, and forgetting how often before other things she had intended to say to Victor Raymond—opinions she had resolved to hold firmly, arguments she had determined to use—had all gone down, like little fragile barques striving to make their feeble way against wind and tide, before the influence of Victor's fascination, and the sort of mesmeric power he gained over her.

But this time, Hope said, it was different. She might have been induced to believe that he had more religion than people gave him credit for; that he was less selfish, less extravagant, less even of a flirt than some people supposed him to be—people who were disposed to be hard on his faults and blind to his virtues.

But here was a fact to which no one could shut their eyes. It was cruel, heartless, wicked to have paid such attention as he had done to one girl, whilst engaged—actually engaged—to be married to another. Even if this engagement had been a mistake on his part—and Hope believed that it must have been, for how could any happily engaged man be as Victor had been during that month's visit at Wallingford—even if he had formed an engagement with some one who he had found afterwards could not satisfy his ideal, who did not share his refined tastes and appreciate his many gifts (and if so how sorry Hope was for him)—still it could be nothing but very, very wrong to have been to her all that Victor had been, under his circumstances.

"Many a girl might have lost her heart to him," she said to herself, "and been made miserable all her life."

And her spirit rose up within her, making her long more than ever for this meeting, in which she was to show him that she had *not* lost her heart, and that she was as happy as before he came to Wallingford. She even looked out the gayest of her songs in case she should have to sing, and practised them over to make sure of singing them well.

Friday passed, and no one came near the house. Miss Lucilla had gone up to the Colonel's to make final arrangements about Miss Prynne's coming to them to-morrow. "Hope would be busy she knew."

So Hope packed her trunk for Westbourne—not quite as carefully as usual, for her mind was distracted with watching the garden gate of the opposite house, and she forgot several

things which she had especially wished to remember. Even a book Mrs. Andrewes had asked her to bring, when next she came to Westbourne, was left behind.

"It was not like Miss Hope," Margery said afterwards, "to forget anything. She was sure she had been feeling very uneasy about Mrs. Andrewes."

Hope was *not* like herself that day. She could not settle to anything, though there were so many things which she ought to have done. Her district report had to be made up, and it would be necessary to do so with special care, as she would not be present herself to explain anything; but although she did it over and over again, she could not make the figures come to the same amount twice running, so she set it aside to do it in the evening. Then she had promised to cut out a frock for one of her Sunday scholars, but after finding that she had cut two of the breadths upside down, this also was laid aside. Other occupations shared the same fate. Everything went wrong. The afternoon was gone, and Hope had seen and heard nothing more interesting than the postman's knock and the Miss Johnstones going out and coming in quite by themselves.

Yet though she had done nothing all day she was more tired when her aunt returned, and they sat down to tea together, than she usually felt after a hard day's work, and so irritable that she could scarcely bear with Miss Lucilla's small stories of the things she had seen and heard in the course of her afternoon's visiting. It was late before she was ready for bed that night: the district report had to be made up, and some of the things set right which had gone persistently wrong in the afternoon, yet must be done somehow before she left next day, so that when Hope took her Bible to read, and afterwards knelt to pray, she had little power left for either duty.

And yet when she laid her head on her pillow she could

not sleep. Never had she spent such a miserable night not even when she had lain awake, in times gone by, waiting for Frank's return, or in those sad nights when she had wept herself to sleep mourning for her mother or her father.

For then everything was clear, if it was sad. She knew what the trouble was, and how to meet it. But all to-day she had not known what she really wanted. Her mind had been too confused to admit of any definite thoughts or prayers. At length she rose from her bed, and, kneeling beside it, repeated the Lord's Prayer. It had been a habit of hers to do so when she was a little child and used to be sorely frightened at being left alone at night.

"Lead us not into temptation." "Deliver us from evil." Two such short sentences, the granting of which saves from unknown sorrows and sins in this world, as well as from separation from God and happiness in the world to come.

In all sincerity these words went up from Hope's heart that night, or rather that morning, for night had given place to day an hour before, and the morning sunshine was flooding her room with light when she fell into a short, troubled sleep.

Next day, however, she woke, feeling heavy enough in head and eyes, but lighter at heart than she had been for some little time. There had been no deceit upon her lips when she had cried unto her God. Her heart had been overwhelmed with many foolish imaginings and strong temptations, but God had led her to the rock that was higher than these, and had answered her prayer—not according to her heart's desire, but in His faithfulness and in His righteousness. He who searcheth the hearts and knoweth what is the mind of the spirit, had made intercession for her—not according to her will, but according to the will of God. He had separated the precious from the vile—granted the good, and refused what would have been evil.

The beginning of the answer to that short prayer came to her in a return of that peace which none can feel save when their minds are stayed on God, and the absence of which had been the secret of her soul's disquietude during the last few hours.

Hope was busy, cheerfully busy, with her last arrangements, when again Mrs. Sullivan came to disturb her with an early visit.

"I met Miss Johnstone in the town just now," she said, "and I walked back with her; coming out of my way on purpose to see if you are really going this afternoon. They heard from Mr. Raymond this morning. He was spending the day with some friends at a distance, and never received their letter until he returned at night, so he could not have come yesterday as they wished. He is very sorry to have missed seeing Mr. Johnstone, but it could not be helped. They expect him this afternoon."

Mrs. Sullivan had seen Victor's note, in which there had been no mention of Hope. She had wondered whether Mrs. Johnstone had told him of her intended departure for Westbourne. Hope inwardly wondered the same, but she made no remark in reply to Mrs. Sullivan's information; only when her friend again suggested her remaining "just till Tuesday, as the picnic was now finally arranged for Monday, and the weather was settling so fine that Losely woods would be looking perfectly exquisite," she was firm in saying "she must go to-day;" adding that the telegram which Mrs. Sullivan offered to take herself to the office for her might startle Mrs. Andrewes very much.

So the railway carried Hope Savile out of Wallingford in one direction, just as Victor Raymond was coming into Wallingford in another.


He called at Mrs. Sullivan's that same afternoon, and she found out at once what she had so much wanted to know—

he had *not* known of Hope's intended departure from Wallingford ; but it would have taken a much more acute observer than Mrs. Sullivan—indeed, we doubt whether any observer, however acute, could have discovered how disappointed Victor was when he found that Hope had left that very day, or what a wound his vanity received when he discovered also that she had left, knowing that he was to arrive that same afternoon.

“And no need for her to go, either,” said the dullest of the Miss Johnstones ; “for her friend was not so very ill—they told her so, and that she need not be in any hurry to come ; but there was no getting her to stop, though we told her you were coming, and begged her to stay just to go with us to Losely on Monday.”

It may be doubted if any of the speeches or actions which Hope had so carefully arranged in the line of conduct she had marked out for herself, with regard to Victor, could have taught him such a lesson, or made such a salutary effect on him, as was produced by this speech from Miss Johnstone, spoken in her entire simplicity.

All that Hope had desired, which was really for her good, had been granted, though by no management or wisdom of her own. All that would have been for her injury, leading her into the temptation from which she had prayed to be kept, and exposing her to the evil from which she asked to be delivered, had been withheld.



CHAPTER XXXIV.


THE train stopped at the well-known Westbourne station, and Hope, leaning forward to look for Dr. Andrewes, who had promised to meet her, saw instead Arthur Gordon waiting on the platform—the first time that she had ever been met by him since the day when they first saw each other at Ashford.

“Has the doctor been sent for anywhere?” she inquired, substituting this question for another which she had not courage to ask, but which Arthur, reading in her face, answered instead—

“Mrs. Andrewes is not so well,” he said; “the doctor did not like to leave her. She was taken ill yesterday; but the doctor does not think there is much cause for alarm, at least not at present. It has only been one of her fainting fits, but it was a very prolonged attack. This morning she had another yet more severe, and since then the heart has not recovered its action.”

Hope's face expressed her alarm, but she only said, “Oh, how glad I am I came!”

“So am I,” he replied. “If you had not been coming this afternoon we should have telegraphed for you. Indeed, I wanted to do so yesterday, but the doctor was afraid of alarming you, and thought, as you would be here so soon, it was better to leave things as they were.”



"I wish you had telegraphed," said Hope. "I could have come at once."

She certainly would. Nor would it have occurred to her mind, as it does to ours, that in that case Victor Raymond would have missed the mortification which her going away, without necessity, had been the means of bringing to him.

Had Hope been telegraphed for to a dying friend, of course she must have gone, however much she might have desired to stay.

The brougham was waiting outside the station, and as they got into it Arthur said, rather hesitatingly, "You will be surprised to find another visitor at the Priory House—some one I don't think you are ever very sorry to see."

"Not Elsie!" exclaimed Hope, in a tone of such delighted surprise as made Arthur immensely thankful that he had taken upon himself to telegraph for her on the previous day, though the doctor would not allow him to do so for Hope.

"Yes," he said, "I confess I have been more uneasy from the first than the doctor either is or will allow himself to be. I always keep Elsie's room ready for her, as you know, and yesterday, after Mrs. Andrewes' first attack, I telegraphed to her that she was not well, and I should be glad if she could come to-day. I knew she could be spared in this holiday time."

"How glad I am!" exclaimed Hope. "What a comfort she will be to me."

It did not occur to Hope, however, that it was expressly that she might be a comfort to her that Arthur had sent for her, nor did Elsie think it necessary to convey this idea to her friend's mind, though she was perfectly aware of it in her own.

There had been another return of fainting during Arthur's absence, and Elsie thought the doctor no longer concealed

from himself the fact that Mrs. Andrewes was very, very ill.

"He has been out of the room several times to see if you had come," she said, "though he told me to let him know directly you arrived, and of course he knew I should do so; but he has been quite unlike himself since this last attack—so restless and agitated."

Arthur went to the sick-room at once, the sick-room being, as he had already told Hope, the inner drawing-room, into which he had himself carried the old lady on the previous evening, when the effort to ascend the stairs to her own bedroom had brought on the first of the violent attacks of fainting which had recurred at intervals ever since. The doctor had decided at once to convert the inner drawing-room into a bedroom for her, "that she might have the pleasure of coming in and out to her birds and her flowers, and being with the family whenever she chose," he said. He had no idea then how ill she was.

It was from Margery that Hope heard of all that Arthur had been to both Doctor and Mrs. Andrewes since the old lady's first seizure.

"He could not have been more devoted, Miss Hope, if he had been their very own son. It just made me love him to see him, thinking of everything, doing everything, and all so quietly, nothing forgotten, but no fuss or flurry. He would not even let one of the men be sent for to help us with the furniture, but said he was sure he could manage everything with me, and that it might agitate Mrs. Andrewes to have Bartlett and Ben about the room. I don't believe there's another such gentleman in the world."

Hope was beginning to believe so also—a belief which gained strength every hour during the three days' constant watching and nursing that followed her arrival at Westbourne.

"Let Arthur do it," the old lady would say herself, "he

is so gentle and yet so strong. He lifts me better than any one."

On the evening of the third day she had become too weak to bear lifting, even by Arthur's strong, gentle hands. He was sitting beside her, however, for Dr. Andrewes had only consented to take a few hours' sorely needed rest on condition that he would not leave her during his absence, but carefully watch her pulse.

Hope and Elsie sat together in the front drawing-room, Hope paying but little heed to the book which she held in her hand, and Elsie making equally small progress in the needlework that lay beside her; but both sitting perfectly silent, lest even a whisper should disturb the dear invalid, separated from them only by the folding-doors, through which they could just catch the sound of her dear voice, wandering in her sleep, as she had been doing all through that day, but more continuously than she had yet done.

At last the door was gently opened, and Arthur made a sign to Hope to go to her.

"You had better call the doctor," he said to Elsie, who had already seen by the expression of his face that there had been a change.

It had been so sudden a change that Hope could scarcely realise, as she drew near her dear old friend's bedside, that she had only left her an hour before. Bending over her to kiss her forehead, she almost started at its coldness. Her eyes were fixed upon Hope's face with a tender but somewhat dreamy look. She evidently knew her, and tried to speak, but her voice failed her.

At that moment, however, Doctor Andrewes entered the room, and a momentary strength seemed to return to her as she turned her eyes towards him, and held out both her hands. He took them in his, and they caught the words, "Raise me."

In a moment Arthur had raised her from the pillow, and still keeping her gentle blue eyes fixed steadfastly on her husband's face, with her thin hands in his, she made a faint effort to utter his name, and with this effort her head fell gently back on Arthur Gordon's shoulder, and her spirit passed away.

That evening Doctor Andrewes and Arthur sat together in the front drawing-room, the doctor in his accustomed seat, and Arthur Gordon opposite to him, in that other arm-chair which, until now, had never been occupied save by one who would never use it more.

He had been about to set it reverently on one side, and fetch another for himself, when the doctor had taken him into the drawing-room "for a few minutes' conversation," but Dr. Andrewes had said quickly—

"No, sit there, my boy; there's no one I would so soon see sitting there now she's gone. She died in your arms, Arthur; I can never forget that."

"I could have wished it had been in yours, sir," was all Arthur could find to say.

"Better as it was," replied the doctor. "If she had been in mine I should have lost that look upon her face, the remembrance of which I shall carry with me to my dying day. You did not see it."

"No, sir; but Elsie and Hope have told me of it."

"And they said?"

"That it was such a look as no one who saw it could ever forget—a look of inexpressible, unutterable love."

"And that not of an earthly love only," said the doctor. "No, Gordon, not even of a love of fifty years of steadfast affection, such as existed between us—thank God, thank God. She tried to say my name. Her old husband was in her thoughts to the last. But it was no earthly love, no, not the highest and noblest, that could bring such a look of

radiant, unearthly happiness over her countenance as shone on it to-night. Gordon, when you and I come to die, may we have such peace in our souls as that look told us she had in hers."

After that there was a silence between them for some little while, and then the doctor, rousing himself with an effort to the purpose he had had before him when he had asked Arthur to "come into the drawing-room for a few minutes' talk with him," said, "Hope tells me she seemed to be talking a great deal during that last half-hour, which—which I would have given—what would I not have given to have spent with her myself! She says they heard her voice continually."

"Yes," said Arthur, "she was talking, but only wandering in a sort of half-sleep. She was not conscious."

And he hoped the doctor would question him no further.

"But I should like to know what she was saying. Every word is precious, every unconscious word even, that has fallen from lips we love, and from which we shall never hear word more."

And Arthur told him—how could he refuse to do so?

On the following evening Dr. Andrewes sat long in his study—the small room opening into the drawing-room on the opposite side from that where his wife lay in her last sleep. He kept his books and papers here, but it was a room which had always been little used; only, indeed, when some one came to speak to him on business which could not be transacted in the surgery, or when—as he would sometimes say, laughingly—Hope's ceaseless chatter to Mrs. Andrewes had driven him to carry his papers out of hearing.

To-night, however, he had sat there for hours.

The girls had gone to bed, and Arthur Gordon to his lodgings; but Ben and Margery were still up, and doubt-

ful what to do, for Ben never shut the house until the doctor ordered him to do so, and to-night he had let them go down after family prayers without a word.

"I think he has forgotten," said Ben, at last; "or perhaps, Margery, he's ill—he's looked terribly bad all day, though he has kept up so well."

And a sudden fear seizing his mind lest anything should be amiss with the master now, he announced his intention of going to see. "Perhaps he had just fallen asleep, worn out with fatigue and sorrow, though it was never the doctor's way to sleep out of his bed."

But Dr. Andrewes was neither asleep nor ill. An especially wakeful "come in" responded immediately to Ben's knock, and he found the doctor sitting at his writing-table, a long parchment paper before him.

"Oh, it's you, Ben," he said; "I was wanting you. Is Margery downstairs?"

"Yes, sir, she is, though it's twelve o'clock, sir. I beg pardon for the liberty I've taken in disturbing you, but I thought you might be asleep, being so tired, or that you were feeling ill perhaps."

A smile passed over the doctor's face, which, ruddy as it was, looked almost pale to-night.

"You did quite right," he said. "I had no idea it was so late, but I've not been to sleep, and I'm not ill, only I was busy, and I never thought about the time. I'm sorry to have kept you up, but I should like you and Margery just to come for a moment. It's only to witness my handwriting. It won't take a minute."

Ben fetched Margery, and together they stood beside their master as he wrote the words "Theophilus Andrewes" at the foot of the paper, and then, by his direction, they both signed their own names beneath.

"It's no business of mine, I know," said Margery, who

could not get to sleep for thinking of that paper, "but I can't make it out. I didn't mean to look at a single word; but you know, Ben, what eyes I've got, and they caught sight of Mr. Arthur Gordon's name without my seeming so much as to turn them on the paper. Surely the doctor has not been altering his will to-night to leave his money to him. I've heard Miss Lucilla Savile say he had not a relation in the world that he cared for, nor the old lady either; but surely, Ben, he'd think of Miss Hope before Mr. Gordon—she that's been like a child to him."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Ben. "I dare say he has thought of them both. Any way it's not for us to trouble ourselves about it. There's one thing quite certain, and that is, the doctor will do what's just by everybody. It must be a puzzling matter to know what *is* best, when one has got a good bit to leave and no one particular to leave it to."

Dr. Andrewes had certainly found it so that night, as he sat hour after hour in his study with that paper before him, recalling his conversation with Arthur—recalling also other conversations both with him and with his wife, the dear, dear wife of fifty years of steadfast, confiding love, from whom he had parted only the day before, and whom he was missing so sorely to-night, when he had something on his mind he desired to ask advice about, and no one from whom to ask that advice.

Next day he sent for his lawyer and showed him that paper. A few days later, having satisfied his mind that there was no fault or flaw in it, he showed it to Arthur Gordon—not without some consideration.

"You see," he said, "I've made you my executor, and I should like you to know the contents of my will."

Arthur Gordon read it through, and even the doctor would have found it difficult to have discovered what were

the precise feelings that passed through his mind as he did so, though evidently they were very defined to himself, as well as very intense.

"No," said the doctor, as the young man attempted to express at least one of these feelings, "Don't thank me. I hate thanks ; and besides, there's nothing to call them forth. You've been as a son to me, and will be still—I can see that. And you were as a son to her. It's what she wished, and that would have been enough for me, if I had had no wish of my own. But I have. I feel I have two children now to provide for, and that it's only justice to divide what I have to leave between them."

Something Arthur said about Hope having been as a child to him long before he ever knew him, but the doctor stopped him at once.

"You need not trouble yourself about Hope," he said ; "she will have quite enough to live upon after the old man's death, even if she should never marry. Perhaps if she had more, some one might marry her for her money—who knows ? As it is, the child will be no heiress ; but she will have an income secured to her which will satisfy even me, and where Hope's comfort and Hope's well-being are concerned, I think if I am satisfied every one else may be.

"And after all, young man," he said, a smile passing over the rugged features, which of late had looked somewhat stern without their former unfailing cheerfulness to brighten them—"after all, a man may do what he likes with his own."

And before Arthur could say more he was out of the room, closing the door after him and leaving the young man to his own reflections.

"It seems the best thing to do," he said to himself, as he buttoned his great coat and stepped into the brougham, which was waiting at the door, he having purposely so timed

his conversation with Arthur as to be able to cut it short at any moment.

"It was her last wish—at least it was the last she ever expressed to me, and I have done my best towards its fulfilment."

And then the doctor lapsed into thoughts of other and later wishes, which must have dwelt in that dear heart, although it had not been given him to hear the last expression of them.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE dear old Priory House had been closed for nearly a week, but to-day the green jalousies were thrown back once more, and with the returning sunshine that streamed into the drawing-room, the birds in their cages carolled forth sweet songs of rejoicing, as though in thanksgiving, and the flowers stretched their pretty heads with fresh fragrance towards the open window, near which Hope Savile sat alone.

Upon the table beside her lay a letter, which Margery had just brought to her, but which she seemed in no haste to read.

Her own thoughts were pleasanter companions at that moment than any words of her aunt Lucilla's could be—or at least, so she imagined.

She had only just returned from that holy "acre of God," where once more she had seen fresh seed sown in firm faith and holy hope—seed which she had helped to water with her tears, though knowing well that in that sown seed there was the power of an endless life, and that in the day of the Saviour's blessed harvest time it would spring up into ripe and rich beauty.

Mrs. Andrewes' life had been a very lovely one, and her old age especially so. In the days of her youth, some might have said that she was almost too quiet and still, for buoyancy becomes the young, and animation sits well upon their

youthful features and light active limbs. But the exceeding quiet of her nature had made her old age singularly graceful, and Hope had been accustomed to hear from one and all the same remark, "What a dear old lady she is!"

But she had also been a suffering one, and now they had to thank God for the sweet rest that her quiet, often feeble steps had gained.

Her last days had been her best days, and this was a very pleasant thought to those who, like Hope, had helped to make them so. In past years she had often felt somewhat lonely, without the joy of children to compensate for the weakness and seclusion which her delicate health involved; but at evening time it had been light—very clear light—without mist or cloud to dim its clearness. Her sun had gone down in a warm, rosy sky, and now the sweet memories of those last bright days lingered like roseate clouds all around Hope, who had herself helped more than any one to create their brightness.

She had been crying very quietly; but she did not feel sad—at least not sad for the loss of her dear old friend.

The invisible world had seemed very near to her for a long time now, from so many of her nearest and dearest being already there. She had a deep interest in the life beyond the grave—a strong personal interest which perhaps none ever feel until some one of their very own—some whose hands they have clasped, whom they have pressed to their heart, whose voice and step still sound upon their ear, have gone over the river, and are dwelling there—out of sight, but still near—they almost tremble often as they feel *how* near.

Hope could often fancy that she could see her dear ones walking in those fair fields beyond; that she could hear the new song which they were singing; and she did not weep because another voice that she knew and loved was joining

now in its sweet melody ; because another star, whose soft light she had often loved to see when it shone here below, had been transferred to the glorious sky to glitter round the Saviour's crown.

She was not sad for her who was gone, but only for the dear companion who had shared her long life journey, and who must needs be very lonely now that she had said her last good-bye to him, and had gone across the river by herself, leaving him to finish the journey alone.

And she was sad for herself too, especially when she thought how gladly she would have stayed with him to cheer his declining years, only——

Only what ?

A year ago Hope would have answered, " Only aunt Lucilla would not let me."

But now she said——

" Only it was not God's will."

She said it from her very heart. Those four words which it had cost her so much to say once, " Thy will be done," came easy to her now, when she had learnt how much better God knew what was good for her than she knew herself.

If ever for an instant she doubted this, she called to remembrance the rich answers that had already been given to her prayers, even in the short experience of her twenty years of life, and how the richest answers to these prayers had come to her first in the form of refusals.

Thinking thus of the dear old friend who was gone, and the dear old friend who was left, and feeling that her aunt Lucilla's letter would only jar on such thoughts, Hope let it stay unopened on the table beside her—the same little table where the soft knitting used to lie day after day, and had lain, even after the dear hands that wrought at it were clasped in death, with the white lilies between them, until Dr. Andrewes had himself removed it.

"I will not ask even you, my child, to finish this work," he had said to Hope, as he prepared to take it away to his own room; "it is useless no doubt to any one but me. But put your things upon the table while you are with me, and whenever you come to me, and tell Margery never to let anything that is not yours lie there. That table must be kept for you, Hope.

"And, Hope," he added, taking from his pocket a bunch of keys, "these must also belong to you, my child. They are the keys of her wardrobe and her dressing-case. Margery locked up everything and brought them to me. They must be yours, Hope. All she had must be yours. I don't know what there is, but it belongs to you whatever it may be."

Hope had remonstrated as well as she was able to do for the tears that would come when she tried to speak, and only came the faster when the doctor begged her not say a word, adding, with tears in his own eyes—such a strange sad sight as those tears were to Hope, who had always known him so bright and merry—

"You would not wish to grieve me, Hope, and I tell you it must be as I say. I could not open those things or touch them; but I shall like to feel that they belong to you. And Margery knows about everything that was hers better than she knew herself. She has often told me so. Let Margery see to it all for you, my child. If there is anything you think you ought to speak to me about, then come to me; but otherwise I had rather not know anything. You and Margery must see to everything."

That had been yesterday, and Hope had taken the keys and given them to Margery, telling her all about it.

And Margery had said, "Yes, yes; don't cry, Miss Hope. It will be all right by and by. I will lock up the keys again in Ben's big desk, and we will see to it later

when we are better able to think of such things. There's no need to trouble your dear heart about it now."

Truly did she say so. It was indeed to be all right.

On this table, the only thing of hers that Hope had yet used, lay, as we have said, Miss Lucilla's letter unopened, until Elsie Gordon, coming in search of Hope, and seeing it lying there, asked "what news there was from Wallingford," and Hope, taking the letter, with some lack of interest, from its envelope, uttered a cry of surprise at the first words that met her eye.

"What is it?" asked Elsie, quite unable to discover the nature of the communication from the expression of Hope's face, "more trouble still?"

"I do not know," Hope answered. "Oh, Elsie, aunt Lucilla is going to be married to Colonel Prynne."

And she repeated her tidings to Dr. Andrewes, who, hearing her exclamation of surprise as he was passing the room, came in at that moment to discover its cause.

He took the letter from her hand, and read it. Considering how very few words it contained, he was long in doing so, and both the girls were struck with the workings of his face the while.

Then turning to Hope, he took her in his arms. "My dear, dear child," he said, "your aunt has found a companion, and I have lost mine. Now you can remain with me. Surely you will stay and comfort the old man in his loneliness. You would not leave me now, Hope. Nor do I believe your aunt will wish it."

Nor did she. By return of post came Miss Lucilla's answer.

Her consent to Dr. Andrewes' second offer to adopt her niece was as selfish as had been her refusal to his first offer.

"Colonel Prynne and she had decided to make Savile Cottage their home during the remainder of his stay at Wallingford. His niece had been adopted by him, and

must therefore make her home with them so long as she had none of her own. Their future plans were uncertain. Probably they might still reside at Savile Cottage when the Colonel's appointment at Wallingford came to an end. Dr. Andrewes' proposal would therefore be as convenient to herself as it would be desirable for him ; and as no doubt it would be advantageous to Hope, since he mentioned that, should she consent to his proposal, he should make it his duty to see that she was well provided for in the event of his death," &c.

The letter did not in any way surprise Hope. She could have written it beforehand had she been desired to do so, from her knowledge of her aunt's character.

But Dr. Andrewes threw it on the table after Hope returned it to him—for he had given it to her to read—with an exclamation that in former days might have been an oath, rarely as the doctor had been at any time given to strong language.

"Read that," he said to Arthur Gordon, who came into the room as Hope left it, feeling that she herself must be the first to tell this news to Margery, whose thankfulness she thought would be only next to her own, for she did not know that at this very moment feelings of even greater joy than hers were filling Arthur Gordon's heart, mingled, however, with other feelings of a different nature.

The doctor saw him bite his lip as he read Miss Lucilla Savile's letter, a sign which he had learned by this time to understand ; but all he said as he returned it was—

"Thank God she has found a home worthy of her, and a protector who can appreciate her."

There was a meaning which Arthur could not fail to comprehend in the doctor's reply :

"May she always do so, dear child. God bless her."

From the depths of the young man's heart a silent "Amen" responded to this prayer.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WEEKS and months passed, and Hope had grown so well accustomed to her new home that it seemed quite an old home to her.

Her life was a happy one, and her "odd relationships," as they were sometimes termed by others, never seemed odd to her. Dr. Andrewes was so completely the "grandfather" to her that he would have had her call him, only she persistently refused to do so, that no grandchild could have cared for his comfort, ministered to his wants, or cheered and cherished him with a freer, happier, more child-like love than she did.

Arthur Gordon was so completely like the brother to her that every one (except herself) considered it impossible he should feel himself to be, that Hope could not have been more at her ease with Frank than she was with him. He led such a busy life that he had but little leisure, but the little he had was given to his friends at the Priory House, in helping Hope to cheer the doctor, and in helping the doctor to cheer Hope.

"It's a lonely life for a young thing like her," the old man would say; "and I'm always glad when you can come in and brighten her up with a little companionship; besides she likes to sing with you, and to hear you sing, and so do I. Why in the world should you stop alone in your lodgings, when it's so much better for yourself, and for us to have

you here. You go in for being a good-natured man, and I should think your very good nature would lead you to give us as much of your company as possible, if you only knew how much we both miss it when we have not got it."

Which was a perfectly true assertion, although Hope might have hesitated in making it quite as frankly as the good doctor did.

But the evenings were lonely when Arthur did not come over to the Priory House—for he had lodgings now in Highbro' Street, next door to the lawyer's, and only a stone's throw from Dr. Andrewes'—and when, as often happened, he was called out just as he and Hope were singing together, or playing a game of whist with the doctor with a dummy for a fourth, the brightness of the evening seemed to go with him—more even to Hope than to the doctor.

Hope generally read to the old man when they were alone, but the reading usually sent him to sleep, and then Hope was left to realise how much she missed Arthur when he was not there to join in every pursuit and share her every interest.

It never occurred to her to drive away such thoughts. Why should she? He was as a brother to her—the best of brothers—always ready with his advice, his sympathy, and his help.

Hope had become very intimate of late with the family of the new vicar of Westbourne, and he, finding in her the readiest of helpers in the parish, gave her plenty of work to do, in which she delighted, but which she always said she never could have done without Arthur. He went to see her poor people, and not only to see them, but often to read with them, and pray with them; finding his way into many a home from which a clergyman would have been excluded, and acting as a pioneer to prepare the way for the

vicar to follow him, and perhaps find a warm welcome in the same house where he had before been met with a repulse.

Hope never now undertook any plan or made any new friends, or entered into any fresh interest in life without consulting Arthur. She had never known how prominent a place she held in his life, still less in his heart, nor did she now know how prominent a place he held in hers—for she never thought about it.

It would have needed that he should have gone away for her to have realised what life would have been to her without him, and this he never did, save for a day or two, for it was not possible that he could be spared from Westbourne.

But one thing Hope *did* realise, and that was the help that Arthur Gordon was to her in spiritual things.

Her growth, both of mind and soul, had been very great during the last year. Arthur had been deeply struck with her development of character—mental, intellectual, and religious; but little did he dream how much he himself had to do with this development.

He was so quiet a man, so reserved and reticent, that he never seemed to himself to be influencing anybody. Sometimes, indeed, he felt disposed to envy others—Hope herself amongst them—who possessing great readiness of speech, and special charms of manner and appearance, were, as it seemed to him, ready provided with all possible means whereby to make their pleadings and persuasions successful. But it was just because his influence was so unconscious that it had such power—at all events on an ardent, impulsive character like Hope's.

Ardent and impulsive she was still, but her ardour and her impulses were all now held in check, subdued by that faith in God which sets the mind free from every prejudice of natural feeling. The energy of her character was not

weakened, but that precipitancy of nature was gone which had so often urged her in former days to do and say things in haste which she bitterly regretted afterwards. Excitement no longer carried her away like a strong wind, she scarcely knew where, until perhaps she found herself stranded on some perilous rock, from which it was difficult to get free; but she waited to see in what direction God would have her little bark to sail, and then trusted to Him to fill its sails, and guide her there. She was fully as bright and cheerful, and even as gay as in the merriest days that had gone by; but with all this, there was a gravity and a dignity and a sweet restfulness about her which had come with later years, and which were owing chiefly—as Hope herself realised—to her friendship with Arthur Gordon, and the influence he had gained over her by the quiet power of his personal character.

Truly might it have been said of Arthur, as it was once said of another, that “he shone, not because he desired to shine, but because he was a luminous object.” Light streamed from him in every point of his character, though he was as unaware of it as was Moses himself when he came down from the mount. His life was a light—a constant reflection of the life of Him who is the light of the world; and nowhere did these beams shine so brightly as at home, and consequently no one lived so much in their warmth and strength as did the doctor and Hope—unless indeed it was Ben, who perhaps saw more of him than did any one else, and who looked upon him as a sort of combination of a hero and a saint *almost* worthy of his worship.

Hope herself, in the days when Margery's adoration of her had been at its height, was never elevated on quite as high a pinnacle in the mind of her simple little maid, as was Arthur in the mind of his man Ben.

There had been many earthly elements in Margery's

grateful enthusiastic love for her beautiful young mistress, who was so good and kind to her, and loaded her continually with benefits. But Ben's admiration for his young master was based on a moral foundation only. There was nothing striking indeed about his master's appearance, nothing in the least seductive or fascinating. Any one seeing Mr. Arthur Gordon for the first time would have said of him only that he was an ordinary looking man, tall and well-built certainly, but plain-featured, and rather silent and retiring; but in Ben's opinion he was the one man of all others worthy of admiration and of imitation.

How many times had he not said to Margery those same words which Margery herself had once said of him to Hope.

"I don't believe there's another such gentleman in the world. Anyways there can't be many, for they all say alike—every soul that comes to the surgery; every person that talks to me outside the doors, when he's a visiting within—that they never, any of them, saw his like. It don't need to hear him speak, Margery—and it's a good thing it don't, for he isn't given to speak much—to know what he's like. It's enough to see the look in his eye, and the way he walks. He's as true as he is firm, and as tender as he is strong. There's only those who are about with him as I am who know the good he does, and the quiet way in which he does it."

Thus would Ben talk often to Margery, and Margery would repeat all he said to Hope, who smiled to herself sometimes, as she listened to her maid's warm praises, thinking how needless any words of Margery's were to convince her of Arthur's worth, when she herself knew him so much better than Margery.

As she truly did. There had never been any sentiment in her feeling for him, nor had he the least fascination for her. He was her friend, the best friend she had ever had,

and every day she realised more and more fully that his friendship was the chief happiness and blessing of her present happy life.

The loss of her dear Mrs. Andrewes was still daily and hourly felt, for the need of a woman's sympathy makes itself felt to other women at so many points in their daily life ; but even this blank was very much filled by Margery's constant presence in the house, and the devotion of her faithful, thoughtful care and love. Truly had the lines fallen now to Hope in pleasant places. Hers was a most untroubled sky of peace and love, and yet the old doctor, as he observed and reflected, which he did more than ever now that so many of his observations and reflections had to remain buried within his own breast, believed that on the horizon of this calm, untroubled, if not very brilliantly coloured sky, he could see signs and tokens of brighter days in the future, when the air should be quite as soft and still, and free from chill or storm as now, but the sun should shine with far greater brightness, throwing a richer colouring on the pleasant landscape of the daily life of his darling child, and diffusing over it a new warmth, the influence of which would reach even to him, cheering and invigorating his declining years.

Such thoughts were in the old man's heart this evening, raising fresh hope within it ; and the expression of his face was singularly bright and happy, though he too remembered what day this was, and knew well why Hope had carried with her such a wealth of lovely flowers to the cemetery, where, week by week, she laid the tokens of her loving, reverent remembrance on her three dear graves—her mother's and her father's, lying side by side, and sweet Mrs. Andrewes', beside which lay the space marked out already for her husband.

It was her habit always, at such times, to carry her flowers into the doctor's study ; indeed, she sometimes left

them there for hours before, knowing that he liked to look at them, and think where they were going—where he himself often saw them afterwards, though never when Hope was with him.

There were some occasions when even the genial old man liked best to be alone, and never once had he yet taken Hope with him to his wife's grave, though she knew from Margery that the horses were often stopped at the cemetery gate, and that it was sometimes long before the doctor returned from his visits there.

Indeed Hope discovered afterwards that he had been there that very morning, though he did not say so when he took the cross of flowers into his hands, and said it was "most lovely," and kissed Hope, and prayed that God would bless her.

"You are late in going out, my child," he said; "you will not have time to go to Ash Lane."

"Oh, yes, I shall," she answered. "I meant to have started earlier, but several things have detained me, and I could not get my flowers arranged sooner. I really must just go into Mrs. Owen's, however, for Mrs. Jones came this morning to fetch the medicine for her, and she told Margery that the husband had been drinking again, and the poor creature has had a wretched night, and is as weak as she can be. Margery has made her some jelly, and I must take it to her myself. I cannot go to-morrow, and Mrs. Jones thinks she may not live till Monday.

"I wish you could have had the carriage," said the doctor; "but Arthur was obliged to take it to Newstead, we do so miss the ponies; however, Ben says that Fairy will be well enough to go out again on Monday. I should have been tempted to let him try her to-day if I had known you would be going out so late and so far."

"Don't trouble your dear self about me," replied Hope.

"it's my own fault that I am a little late in starting, but I shall be back in good time ; and I would not have had Fairy put into harness a day or an hour sooner than Ben thinks she ought to be, on my account, for anything that you could offer me."

For Hope's love and care for her dear cream-coloured ponies were greater than ever, and she had been as anxious as Ben himself about one of them, which had met with a trifling accident.

"I will not stay at Mrs. Owen's," she added ; "I will only carry the jelly to her, and see how she is, and you may expect me back in good time to make your tea."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TEA-TIME came, however, and the servant brought in the hissing urn, and was very much surprised not to find Miss Hope waiting, as usual, in the sitting-room ready to make the tea, for punctuality was one of Hope's strong points. She sometimes had to wait for the two doctors, for they could not always count upon their time, but she never made them wait for her.

Consequently the doctor had been feeling rather fidgety for some time, and his fidgetiness was just turning into anxiety, when Margery appeared, bringing a message to say that Ben had returned with the carriage, and Miss Hope would be coming directly.

"Coming from where?" asked the doctor; "what does Ben know about Miss Hope; hasn't he been to Newstead with Mr. Gordon?"

"Yes, sir," said Margery; "I know he has been to Newstead, but I don't know where he saw Miss Hope. All Ben told me to come and tell you, sir, was that they had met Miss Hope and Mr. Gordon, and they had gone to the cemetery together; but Mr. Gordon had bid him bring the carriage home, and say they would be here directly."

"Gone to the cemetery together," repeated the doctor to himself, after Margery had left the room; "gone there together. I never should have thought Hope would have gone there with him."

And he sat thinking—thinking.

Was it then yet to be as he had hoped, as she had prayed? Was that last wish of her dear heart to be fulfilled now, to-night, of all nights in the year.

And then he called himself a foolish old man, passing into his dotage before his time, for allowing himself to dwell on such thoughts. Yet for all that the thoughts returned. Why should *not* Hope and Arthur go together to the cemetery? he asked himself. And yet, why *should* they?

The doctor could not tell, but we can.

Hope had, as we have seen, been delayed in starting for her walk, but she little dreamed of the further and more serious delay that she would yet meet with before she reached the cemetery.

She had intended merely to take the jelly to suffering Mrs. Owen, one of Arthur's poor patients, whom she had been visiting frequently of late, and to leave it with her, with just a word of inquiry and sympathy.

But she was little prepared for the scene awaiting her at the cottage, and yet she *was* prepared, for her heart was full of love and sympathy, and surely it is just at such times as these that we are best prepared for whatever may come to us, however unexpectedly it may come.

Something strange in the appearance of the cottage struck her as she came up to it, and a second glance showed her that the blind of the little window on the right hand of the door, and the blinds of the two small windows above were drawn down, but the door stood wide open, and she heard voices within—men's voices, speaking in a loud tone.

She had never before found Owen in the house; he had been always away at his work when she had visited his wife; but evidently he was at home to-day, and some other man with him, and she felt frightened, for Mrs. Jones had told Margery that he had been drinking. For a moment she

shrank from entering the cottage, and then, reproaching herself even for the selfishness of the thought, she went calmly and courageously up to the open door, and knocked at it; not without a lifting up of her heart, however, to that heavenly Father to whom it was a habit now to turn for help and strength at every moment of difficulty or of weakness.

Her knock interrupted the talking within, and to her relief it was answered by Mrs. Jones, the woman who had been such a kind neighbour to poor Mrs. Owen all through her illness.

"Oh, it's Miss Savile," she exclaimed. "Come in, miss, come in."

And the expression of her face conveyed to Hope the idea that she had something to say which she did not like to put into words, which must be overheard by the men in the kitchen towards which she glanced.

Hope hesitated.

"How is Mrs. Owen?" she said.

"She's dead, miss," was the reply. "She did not live long after I got back from your house. She went off quite sudden at the last. Her husband fetched me from our place. I came to do the last bit of service for her that I could."

"Only I ain't going to let her do it alone, you see, miss," interrupted one of the men, coming forward at that moment from the kitchen, and leaning against the wall in the little passage, to support his unsteady frame, as Hope perceived at once.

"You see, miss," continued the man, "this here is my wife. She's been mighty friendly with our poor neighbour here, and Owen, he came this afternoon to tell her she was gone, all in a moment, and that he would like her to come and lay her out for her burial. I found her gone when I

got back from my work, so I came after her here, and found she was just a-going to do as Owen wished; only you see, miss, I don't choose as she should do it alone. And I ain't a-going to let her, and that's an end to it. We were a-disputing about it when you knocked; for Owen, he wants it done, and he don't want me to go near her; and I ain't going to let my missus go up there by herself—and what I say I mean, as she knows better than any one."

"I don't at all mind going alone, if he would only let me," said Mrs. Jones in a deprecating tone.

"And I'm not going to let the like of him go near her," exclaimed a voice from within.

And Owen himself, whom Hope had never yet seen, stepped from the kitchen, and stood up tall and strong in the passage.

If he had been drinking, as Mrs. Jones said he had, he seemed perfectly sober now, and Hope felt a sort of protection in his presence. At all events there was some right feeling in the determination which he expressed, not to let a man in Jones' condition enter the room where his dead wife lay.

Jones had already begun to reply in an angry tone, when Hope, remarking the flash in his eye, and the heightened colour in his face, and afraid of what might follow, turned quietly to him, and with a strange courage filling her soul, said calmly, as she fixed her large eyes on his red and blood-shot ones:

"I will go upstairs with your wife. You cannot object to her going if I am with her. It is not the place for you. I should advise your going home."

And then turning to Mrs. Jones, she said, "Let us go up together."

And she led the way to the room where she had so often read and prayed with the sick woman who lay at last so

quietly at rest, her eyes shut for ever from the scenes that had so often made her heart to ache and ache again, her ears closed for ever to the sounds that had so often made her flesh to creep and quiver.

The basket of flowers was still in Hope's hand, and taking from it some of the white lilies, she placed some on the pillow on which Mrs. Jones had laid the dead woman's head, and some in her cold, white hands.

Not a sound meanwhile had been heard from below, save the few words that had been exchanged between the two men, as Hope led the way upstairs, and Mrs. Jones followed her, in silent admiration of the brave young lady.

"You had better do as the lady says, and go home," said Owen.

"I tell you I bean't going to stir from this house without my missus," was the reply.

On which Owen, who had been no doubt impressed by Hope's manner with the feeling that the present time was not a fit one for quarrelling, retired into his kitchen; whilst Jones, planting himself once more against the wall in the passage, struck a match on his boot, lighted his pipe, and was still deliberately filling the place with its smoke when the women returned from upstairs, their work reverently done.

"Now you come along with me," he said, taking his wife's arm, and almost dragging her out of the cottage.

Hope was left alone with Owen, and for a moment hesitated what to say. She knew he had been a bad husband, and what word of comfort could she give him, even if he felt the need of any?

"Would you like to see her?" she said; "she looks very sweet."

"I don't mind," was the reply.

And again Hope led the way up the narrow staircase.

At sight of his dead wife, whom he had often treated so ill, lying pale and still, with an expression of patience on her white face, a change passed over the man's countenance.

Hope saw his features working as though in great distress, but before she could make up her mind what to say to him, he frightened her most terribly by throwing himself passionately across the bed, where he lay, sobbing aloud, and praying to his wife to forgive him.

Only once before in all her life had Hope felt more relieved than she was when, at that moment, she heard the sound of a carriage stopping just outside—a carriage which she knew must be the doctor's brougham, even before she had turned to the window, and, to her inexpressible thankfulness, saw Arthur jump quickly from it and enter the cottage. An instant afterwards he was in the room, utterly astonished at the scene he found there.

But in another moment he had understood the whole thing, and a few firm words brought Owen back to composure.

Hope long remembered the manner in which Arthur spoke that day to that poor man. If ever words could lead to repentance she felt as if those words of Arthur's must do so. And they did produce some effect upon Owen's mind.

"I won't leave her," he said; "I'd meant to lock up the place and go off to my brother's; but I'll stop and take care of her now, if I haven't done so before. And I thank you, miss, with all my heart for what you've just done for her. I'm bad enough, the Lord knows, but I wasn't going to let that fellow go near her when he was so drunk he couldn't stand."

Arthur looked at Hope for an explanation, but it was Owen who gave it to him; and having heard it, he wondered no longer that Hope should be looking so deadly pale.

When they had left the cottage he begged her to go back

in the brougham and let him take her flowers to the cemetery, since it was so late that he was afraid the doctor would be growing uneasy, but this she declined.

"To-day," she said, "she must go to the cemetery herself," and the tone in which she said "to-day" brought to Arthur's remembrance also what day it was.

Almost to his surprise, however, Hope consented to the next suggestion, which was that he should go with her to the cemetery, and Ben take back a message to the doctor to say that he and Miss Savile would be returning directly.

If Hope and Arthur themselves had been asked the question some time afterwards which Dr. Andrewes was at that moment asking himself, as he sat dreamily in his arm-chair—namely, *why* should they two have gone together to the cemetery that night? they would have answered simply because God took them there.

It was no chance that had sent Hope several unexpected delays, and prevented her from starting for her walk, as she had intended, very much earlier in the afternoon. It was no chance that had taken Arthur Gordon to Owen's cottage at that particular moment, when Hope was feeling unnerved by the scene in which she had just taken part there, and a little unwilling to go on by herself, at that late hour, to so solitary a spot as the cemetery, yet resolved to do so, since the love within her was stronger than the fear.

It was no chance, but only another and a very important turn of that wheel of God's providence which was to work the greatest of all the changes, and oh, how far the happiest in Hope's life.

Together she and Arthur Gordon stood beside the grave, and laid the flowers upon it, and talked just for a few short moments, for they had no time to linger long, of her whom they had both so loved; and as they left the cemetery and were walking homewards, they spoke of that day and that

very hour one year ago, and how well they both remembered it.

"Elsie and I sat so silent in the drawing-room," said Hope, "and we could hear her dear voice, talking, talking, like a gentle murmur—do you remember?"

"Remember!" he replied, "shall I ever forget?"

"She was dreaming, you said," continued Hope.

"Yes," said Arthur.

And then he added, "Would you like me to tell you her dream, Hope?"

"Oh yes," she said quickly. "I have so often wished to ask you."

"And I," he answered, "have so often wished to tell you. She was dreaming, Hope, that you and I were kneeling at the altar together, and that she was kneeling beside us. And she prayed her prayer aloud, thanking God who had given her the desire of her heart, and praying Him to pour His richest blessings on her two dear children, to bless them abundantly as husband and wife. It had been the dream of her life, she said. It has been the dream of mine, Hope. Is it ever to be a reality?"

Arthur waited a few minutes for her answer, and then in a clear, quiet voice, trembling with emotion, but quite calm, Hope said,

"And I had never dreamed of this, and I am not dreaming now. It is all real—such happy, happy reality."

And hand in hand they came into the doctor's room, and asked the old man for his blessing.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOPE GORDON sat in her pretty drawing-room—that drawing-room with the birds and the flowers which had once been Mrs. Andrewes' and was now Mrs. Arthur Gordon's—with her little son upon her knee.

The fire was burning brightly, and the table with the coffee stood prepared before it, ready for whichever of the doctors might come in first—the old doctor, who was making his afternoon round in his brougham, still driven by the faithful Bartlett; or the young doctor, who was out in the same pony carriage, driving those same dear cream-coloured ponies, whose glossy coats were soft and silky as ever, thanks to Ben's constant care.

The latter was the first to return, and scarcely had he received his welcome from his wife and child before the door was opened, and Margery appeared, with a face so white that Hope thanked God at the instant that her boy was safe in his father's arms.

"What is it, Margery?" asked Mr. Gordon.

It was some time now since any such chance or change had come to that household as could whiten the face, or make the voice to tremble.

"It's a man, sir," said Margery; "such a strange looking man, and he says he's Ashford's father, and wants the child; and he looks deadly ill, and I don't think he's quite sober."

"Where is Ashford?" asked Mr. Gordon, quickly.

"Out with grandpapa," answered Hope—for the doctor had had even this wish granted at last, and since her baby's birth Hope had no longer declined to call him "grandpapa"—"he was dressed to go out with Margery and baby when the carriage came round, and grandpapa bid Bartlett take him on the box."

For little Ashford Hope had been a resident at the Priory House for some time now.

Ben and Margery had no children, and Dr. Andrewes had given Ashford to them to be as one. He knew what the blank was, he said, and would like to do what he could to fill it.

Giving his little son into Hope's arms, Mr. Gordon told Margery to remain with her mistress, and went to see about this man of whom she told. It was not long before he returned.

"Whoever he may be," he said, "he's very ill. That much of his story is true at all events."

Then bidding Margery take the baby to the nursery, he added,

"I must get him to the hospital at once. Ben is with him in the surgery now, and will remain till the carriage comes. I wish it were here."

And as if in answer to the wish, Rhubarb and Magnesia's heads turned the corner of the street, and, at the slow pace usual to them now, drew the brougham up to the door.

Arthur was ready to receive them there.

To Margery's relief, his first words were addressed to the little rosy fellow perched up beside Bartlett on the coach-box—the child who had become almost as dear to her and Ebenezer as though he had been their very own, and whom they already looked upon as their delight in the present and comfort in the future.

"Jump down, Ashford, and run up to mammie in the

nursery," she heard her master say, as he held out his hand to help the boy down from his high position ; and in another moment Margery had met him at the nursery door, and was holding his little fat hand fast in hers.

"Keep the carriage !" was Arthur's next direction, addressed to Bartlett ; "I have to go to the hospital ;" and, assisting the old doctor to alight, they both went together into the surgery.

Then Hope ran up to the nursery to Margery, and together they still watched from the nursery window until the doctor's step was heard coming up the stairs, when Hope went to meet him ; but Margery, holding baby Henry safely in one arm, but retaining firm grasp of little Ashford Hope with the other hand, still watched on until she saw her master and Ben come out of the surgery door, and with them the strange man.

Then she turned away whiter, if possible, than before, and sank into the rocking-chair, feeling so sick and faint that little Ashford, who had at last released his hand from the grasp in which he had greatly disliked its being held so long, looked frightened into her white face, and said, "What's the matter, mammie dear?"

She did not answer ; but when, a moment after, Hope returned to the nursery and repeated the question, she replied,

"Oh, ma'am, it's Mr. Gunner. I thought it must be, and now I see it is. But what does he mean about being Ashford's father, and wanting the child."

"Hush, Margery," said Hope, with a glance at the boy who had, however, already caught her words.

"Ashford has no father," he said ; "but he's got a good daddie and a good mammie, and he won't ever go away from them."

"You may go to daddie now, Ashford," said Hope ; "see, there he is in the stable-yard with the ponies."

And the child ran off gladly to Ben, with whom he was always happiest.

"Margery," said Mrs. Gordon, coming into the nursery that evening, and making Margery resume her seat, while she herself sat down beside her, "it is as you thought, that man is your old acquaintance, Mr. Gunner; but you must not be startled when I tell you that he is indeed Ashford's father, though you need not fear his taking his child from you. It is such a sad, sad story. He has told it all to Mr. Gordon, and it is a mercy that he has done so, for he is very, very ill; they think he may not live through the night. It seems that he has been going from worse to worse ever since you knew him."

"But he married?" said Margery.

"Yes; and married a very sweet girl apparently, whom he says he really cared for at the time, and for whose sake he meant to give up drinking."

"But he did not?" said Margery.

"Only for a very short time, Margery, as men are wont to do who only make such promises with earthly ends in view, and with earthly strength to help them. After a while the old vice gained its former strength over him, and he lost one situation after another, until at length, it seems they were so poor, they positively had not bread to eat. And it was just at that time that his wife was expecting the birth of her first child."

"Our Ashford?" said Margery, keeping perfectly composed in the interest she felt in the story, and her great desire to understand it perfectly.

"Our Ashford," replied Hope, "doubly ours now, that we know the wonderful providence that gave him to us first, and is now confirming the gift. It seems that at this time Mr. Gunner had seen and answered an advertisement in a paper—seen it in a public-house he says—inquiring for

workmen for some works at Ashford which were needing extra hands. He determined to go there, telling his wife that he would either return to her as soon as he had made a little money, or send for her. But the poor thing never heard of him again. He obtained employment and the wages were good, so good that they helped to his breaking out into a fresh fit of dissipation. The first Saturday that he received his pay, he went on what he calls 'the spree,' and that night he got into a quarrel with some of the other men—Mr. Gordon did not give me the particulars, Margery, he said they were not fit for you or me to hear—but there was a fight, and Gunner was very much hurt. He was taken to the hospital—it is so strange, Margery, to think that if his poor wife had died there, as she would have done if Parvis had not been so kind in wishing her to be kept where she was, they might have been under the same roof."

"But did his wife die?" said Margery.

"Yes, yes, I forget," said Hope; "I have not come to this—the strangest part of all—and to us the most important. He was six whole weeks in that hospital, between life and death, the result of the blows he had received, and the state of mad intoxication in which he had been when he received them. If he had only confessed his sad story to the clergyman who visited him! But he would not. He would not even give them his true name, but made up a false story, when at last he recovered sufficiently to be questioned on the subject."

"And his wife—you said she was dead—did he not try to find her?"

"Yes; he wrote to her as soon as he was able to do so, telling her of his illness, and inquiring for her; but the letter was returned to him by the landlady with one from herself, saying that his poor young wife had set out in search of him, as soon as she had regained her strength sufficiently to do

so, carrying her baby with her, and intending to go to the very place—Ashford—from which his letter was dated, but without a shilling in her pocket except what she herself had lent her. This, the landlady added, she had promised to repay as soon as she had found her husband; but she had never heard word of her since, though she had read in the paper of an accident at Ashford, and her mind had misgiven her at the time that the unknown woman killed might be his young wife. And she enclosed the extract from the newspaper, which she had kept, feeling, she said, ‘that it might be of use at some future time.’”

“But the accident happened at Ashford; had he not heard of it?” asked Margery.

“Not to connect it in any way with his wife,” replied Hope. “The accident—oh how well *I* remember every detail, Margery—had taken place when he was at his worst. After he recovered he heard it talked of, but the death of the poor young woman was not brought before his mind in any way so as to make any impression on it. He had no thought of his wife having been one of the victims of that night’s terrible catastrophe. After he received the landlady’s letter, however, he made inquiries about her; he went to the house of the woman where she had lodged; but did not say that he was her husband, or allow indeed that he was any relation, and when he found that the child was in safe keeping, he resolved not to make himself known. I am afraid, Margery, he only determined to do so now from selfish motives. It seems that he has been reduced to sad straits through this wretched habit of drinking, and this we imagine had driven him again to trace our little Ashford in the hopes that those who had taken charge of the boy might show kindness to him for the child’s sake; or Mr. Gordon thinks he may perhaps have thought that we would be willing to pay a sum of money to persuade him to give up

all claim to his boy. He had no trouble in finding out where he was. We have always kept up regular correspondence with the good woman at Ashford who took such care of him."

"And his mother?" said Margery; "who was that poor girl—that poor, poor girl who has gone through all this misery from which I have been saved?"

"By one right act, dear Margery," said Hope.

"By the remembrance of my promise to my mother, never to marry any one who was not good and would not help me to be good. Oh, from what has not that promise saved me! But do you know anything more of her, ma'am, that poor, poor girl, our Ashford's mother?"

"Mr. Gordon will find out more about her, Margery. He has the address of her uncle, for she was an orphan. But there will be no fear, he says, of any one's wishing to take our little Ashford from us; his father has signed a paper, appointing Mr. Gordon his guardian."

And then she added, "the poor fellow would like to see you, Margery; but Mr. Gordon says you are only to go to him if you feel equal to it. If so, he will take you to-morrow."

"Oh yes," said Margery, who was crying quietly now—tears in which pity and sorrow and deep thankfulness were strangely mingled—"I will go to-morrow."

But before to-morrow came, the unhappy man was dead. Whether repenting or not, only He who reads the heart could tell. Words of contrition, cries for pardon, certainly fell from his lips, but where these are but death-bed utterances, they can give but little food for comfort. His last words were a message to Margery.

"Tell her," he said, "to thank God for the mercy that spared her from marrying me; and bid her tell the boy—as his dying father's message to him—all his life to hate the drink which was the curse of both his parents' lives."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BREAKFAST was over, but young Mrs. Gordon still sat at the table with a letter in her hand, which she was considering so intently that she was quite unaware that her three companions were watching her with an expression of some amusement on their countenances ; these three companions being Dr. Andrewes, her husband, and her mother-in-law, Mrs. Gordon.

"Well, Hope," exclaimed her husband at last, after standing for some time with his coat buttoned up, "have you made up your mind concerning that letter of Mademoiselle Mallerie's? for, if not, I am afraid I really must go on my rounds, and leave you to come to a decision without me, with the united help of my mother and the doctor. They have been sitting very patiently for some time, waiting for you to make the move."

"I beg your pardon. I beg every one's pardon," exclaimed Hope, rising from the table with a sweet look of loving apology to one and all.

"I'm afraid I am very rude, and very undecided too, but I don't know what to do. I should greatly like to see Mademoiselle Mallerie, but I don't like leaving home and baby. If Mademoiselle would only have come here, as we so much wished !"

"Which she can't do, evidently," replied Arthur ; "so now, Hope, be sensible for once, and make up your mind."

"Really, Arthur," remonstrated his mother, "you are very rude. Be sensible *for once!*"

"Yes, my dear mother. I say 'for once,' for where the children are concerned, especially little Winifred, Hope is not sensible, and she knows it."

"Well, then," interrupted Hope, "I will leave it to you to decide for me."

"Which I do at once by advising you to go; and I think I can guarantee that, though your baby is such a delicate little morsel, between my mother and me and Margery, we will take such care of her that she shall neither be exposed to draught, or over-fed, or under-fed, between now and this evening, when we shall hope to see you back again. And to reward you for your strength of mind," he added, "if you will be ready in half an hour I will come back at that time and drive you myself to the station."

And so saying he took his departure.

Hope followed him downstairs to see him off from the door, as nothing but illness had ever prevented her doing from the first happy day when he had brought her back as a bride to the old home, which had been such a new home to her ever since—a home of new joys, new interests, and new blessings returning with every fresh day.

Then, seeing that the doctor was established as usual in his arm-chair for his morning half-hour's enjoyment of his newspaper, she ran quickly up to her pleasant bedroom to get ready for her day's expedition.

It was quite an event for Hope to be going away for a whole day. Ever since her marriage she had been, as much from inclination as from duty, a very strict follower of the apostolic injunction to all married women, to be "keepers at home."

Only once, indeed, during the last four years had she stayed away from home without Arthur and the children,

and that had been when she had gone to help Rose Prynne in nursing her Aunt Lucilla in what had proved her last illness.

That month's sojourn away from the dear peaceful Priory House had been the first trying time to Hope that she had known since her marriage ; for, though she had gone, as we said, to help Rose Prynne, all the nursing had devolved on her ; and instead of receiving any sympathy and assistance from Rose, the ill-tempered selfishness and discontent of that young lady had been the chief source of her trial.

The days had gone by when Miss Lucilla Savile and Rose Prynne had been pleasant companions and chief friends to each other. This pleasant companionship and great friendship may be said to have ceased with Miss Savile's marriage to Colonel Prynne.

After that jealousy arose, and consequent dislike. Rose was not a girl to take gracefully the second place where she had hitherto held the first, nor did she possess any of those qualities, either of natural disposition or of christian grace, which had enabled Hope to live peacefully and happily with her Aunt Lucilla.

Still, the home at Savile Cottage had been one of outward order and peace in spite of many inward heart-burnings and much secret animosity so long as Colonel Prynne had lived. He was one of those individuals whom all agree to label "combustible," and to treat accordingly. In the earlier days of his military life the officers of his regiment would say, laughingly, one to another, "Now mind what you are about, for you know the colonel goes off at half-cock," liking him greatly all the while for his many good qualities, and especially for the honesty and the kindness of heart which compensated for his impatient nature and fiery temper.

Rose had learned to stand very much in awe of him.

Mrs. Prynne soon learned the same lesson, and the awe which they both felt for him led to their living, at all events seemingly, in peace with each other, so long as he was there to repress all outward expression of inward jealousies or dislikes ; since it was a principle with the Colonel to allow no one to make themselves in any way disagreeable except himself, and he considered it his sole prerogative to be permitted to find fault. But his death, which had taken place just one year before Mrs. Prynne's, had removed this restraint upon jealousy and ill-temper, and since then the home at Savile Cottage had been a very unhappy one.

Both the elder and the younger lady desired to have their own way, and this was an impossible matter now, since their tastes and wishes—or perhaps we should rather say their capabilities—were no longer the same.

Rose Prynne delighted in society as much as ever ; but Mrs. Prynne's power of enjoying it had failed with failing health, and what had once been a delight had of late become a burden.

The only shadow that had crossed the perfect brightness of Hope's married life had been caused by the tidings that came from time to time from her friend Mrs. Sullivan, telling her how increasingly weak and weary her aunt Lucilla became, and how little sympathy she and Rose seemed to have for each other. But even these tidings had been brightened by constant remarks from the same friend about her aunt's increased gentleness of manner, and interest in other people, and especially in Hope. "I believe your letters are her chief delight," Mrs. Sullivan wrote ; "she reads them over and over again ; and the books you send her are her constant companions. I should like you to hear the real earnestness of feeling with which she sometimes says to me, 'I do so wish Hope were here !' or, with a heavy sigh, 'If Hope could only be with me !'"

So that when a letter reached Hope from her aunt Lucilla herself, written in a failing hand, and saying that her medical man had owned that she was very ill, and begging Hope to go to her, she went at once, although in delicate health herself.

Hope's intention had been only to remain a week, but finding her aunt far more ill than she had imagined she gave up all thought of returning home for the present, and stayed at Savile Cottage until, just a month after her arrival, her aunt Lucilla died in her arms.

She had been all her life a singularly reserved person, as all the Saviles were, but Hope realised that there was much to comfort one in her death. Though she spoke but little, she always liked to be read to—would ask constantly for special chapters and hymns, and at her own request received the Holy Communion from the same old clergyman, who was still vicar of Wallingford, though almost unequal now to any work at all from extreme old age. Hope was almost her aunt's sole nurse and companion during those last weeks of her life, and her last earthly thought was for her and for Frank.

"God bless you, my dear," she said, "and reward you for the care you have taken of me. And give my love to Frank, and tell him that I am thankful that I have never made a will. You do not need my money, Hope; and I am glad that all I have should go to him. Perhaps it will make it easier for him to marry, as I hear he wishes to do."

After that she had spoken no more of the things of this world, but had listened with gentle humility to words of Holy Scripture and of prayer until she passed quietly away.

Then Hope left everything to Rose Prynne and returned to her home, where her husband and Dr. Andrewes had

been feeling very anxious about her, although they had never once asked her to return, since they knew where her duty lay.

Two months after her aunt Lucilla's death the little baby-daughter was born, who had been so very delicate during her eight months of life that Hope had never left home since then until now, when we return from this long digression to see her in her bedroom, dressing for the day's journey to London, there to see her old friend Made-moiselle Mallerie, who was in England on business. She had written saying it was quite impossible that she should come to Westbourne, as the Gordons urged, since she had yet several things to do in London, and must return next day to Beaumanoir; but begging earnestly that Hope would come to her, if only for a few hours.

Delighted as Hope had been at the prospect of meeting her old friend and governess once more, after so many years of separation, it had cost her, as we have seen, rather an effort to leave her home and children in order to do so; and there was a somewhat anxious look upon her face, as she stood in her bedroom in her travelling-dress and hat, with her delicate little baby-girl clinging round her neck. Such a pleasant bedroom as it was! In former days it had belonged to Mrs. Andrewes, and everything remained now just as it used to be then, when it was one of the chief efforts of the doctor to soothe and enliven every weary hour of an invalid's life to the utmost of his power, by filling her room with every means of luxury and brightness that the most thoughtful love could devise. His one pleasure now was in feeling that all that had been done for her was being enjoyed by Hope, and that she was able to enjoy it without even the sad association of her dear old friend having died there.

"Now give her to me, and let Margery put on your cloak,"

said Mrs. Gordon, as Margery came into the room with little Henry ready dressed to "go with father and mother to the station."

"How often I am reminded," she added, "when I see you with a baby in your arms, of that day—or rather that night—when I came into your room at St. Barnabas' and found you watching over little Ashford. I did not imagine then, Hope, how often I should see you nursing my own little grandchildren."

"And *I* did not imagine," said Hope, "when you made me lie down beside you and go to sleep, whilst you took the baby and nursed him, how often I should see you doing the same thing for my babies—your grandchildren. Oh, how well I can remember thinking then how lovely it must be to have a mother, and finding it hard not to envy Elsie, never dreaming that the day would come when you would be my own dear mother too—as you *are*," she added, with a repetition of the little pretence of jealousy which was a favourite way of eliciting some of the fond words she loved so well to hear; "for I am *quite* your own daughter, am I not?"

"Of course you are," said Mrs. Gordon; "how can my Arthur's wife be anything else? But here is the pony carriage, and you must kiss your baby—only once more—and be gone."

But in spite of Hope's well-known promptitude and punctuality, the baby was kissed once, twice, thrice; so many times indeed that Margery had established little Henry beside his father in the carriage, and there was only time for a very hurried embrace of "grandmother" and "grand-papa" before Arthur's voice was heard asking "if Hope was so bent on *not* going to London that she intended to miss the train."

As he stood at the door of the railway carriage, holding

his little son by the hand, whilst waiting for the train to start, he said—

“And don’t forget to ask Mademoiselle to explain the mystery about Victor Raymond’s marriage. Remember, I shall be quite vexed if you don’t think of asking her.”

“I don’t promise that I will,” Hope replied, with a merry little laugh; “but I would advise *you* to remember the old saying that I learned as a child—

“ ‘Curiosity is a woman’s curse,
But in a man it’s ten times worse.’ ”

Arthur laughed.

“Well, I confess I *am* curious about that, and remember that I shall expect to have my curiosity gratified this evening.”

CHAPTER XL.

"MRS. GORDON," announced the waiter, as he ushered Hope into the room in the London hotel, where her old friend was waiting for her, and Mademoiselle Mallerie came forward to meet the former pupil, whom she had at first not recognized.

"Dear Mademoiselle," said Hope, as she returned her warm greeting, "how glad I am to see you again ; though I confess to having found it rather difficult to leave my little Winifred even for such a pleasure as this, she is still so sadly delicate. I was always weak-minded, you know. But I am so glad, so thankful to see you again. And not the least changed ! I could fancy that we had just come back together from Francheville. It does not seem as if so many years could have gone by since then. You have not altered one tiny little bit."

"Whilst you, Hope, have altered so much ! If the waiter had not announced your name so very distinctly, I should not at the first moment have recognized my favourite little pupil."

A bright smile broke over Hope's face, the arch smile of amusement which would have brought her back to Mademoiselle's remembrance in a moment, as she said—

"Favourite little pupil ! Ah, Mademoiselle ! that *is* nice to hear. You would not have said anything half so nice to me in the old Beaumanoir days."

Mademoiselle Mallerie laughed.

"Certainly not, Hope, for a governess must have no favourites whilst her pupils are with her. Or rather—for I don't suppose she can ever attain such a perfection of justice in her own mind as never to be conscious herself which is the favourite—she must keep the partiality so carefully concealed in her own heart that no one but herself must ever be aware of it. I have no favourites among my 'pensionnaires,' Hope."

"Or at least," said Hope, with another arch smile, "they themselves do not know that you have. Which do you like best, dear Mademoiselle—which gives you least trouble and anxiety, your English lady boarders, or your former pupils?"

For Mademoiselle Mallerie had ceased to take pupils after Rose Prynne and Elsie Gordon had returned to England. Mr. Raymond's failure of health just at that time, and his consequent resignation of the management of his business to his son Victor, had led to the removal of the family to Beaumanoir, and the re-establishment of an English "pension" there, which had since been carried on under the joint direction of Mademoiselle Mallerie and her sister, Mrs. Raymond.

"I still have pupils," she replied; "indeed, teaching is still my principal work, Hope. My sister undertakes the care of the house duties, and of our lady boarders. And à propos of these lady boarders, I have a piece of news for you, Hope, which I think will interest you. Who do you think has been with me this morning? Who do you think is going back with me to-morrow to Beaumanoir, to spend the summer at all events in our 'pension'?"

"Not Rose!" exclaimed Hope, who could think of no one else.

"Yes, dear, Rose; how do you think she will like it? Has she altered during the last year? is she improved by all that has happened to her?"

"I don't think I am the right person to answer questions about Rose," said Hope. "I never was very partial to her, you know, Mademoiselle."

"Nor was I, Hope, I am afraid ; yet it seems as though God intended we should become so, by His allowing us to be thus thrown with her again and again, for she wishes to spend the summer with me at Beaumanoir whilst so unsettled as to a home, for her means make her independent, and she has no family ties ; and then she tells me she thinks of going to Westbourne for the winter."

"She will like the Beacon and all the gaiety," said Hope.

"Let us hope she will like some other things too," replied Mademoiselle—"you and your good husband—and that you will gain a good influence over her. If God throws her with us, He surely means us to be of use to her. Perhaps He is giving us these future opportunities, because we did not make sufficient use of the former ones. Mademoiselle would not be herself, you know," she added, "if she forgot to preach."

"Mademoiselle would not be herself," said Hope, "if she were not the dearest friend in the world. I hope she will yet do Rose as much good as she has always done me."

"I must try," said Mademoiselle, "though I really see very little comparatively of our lady boarders. My work is very much now what it was when you were with us. I look after my dear mother—now in her eighty-second year, but wonderfully well, and in possession of every faculty—and I teach the girls, Cecile and Emilie, and little H  l  ne. The boys, as you know, are all at school still."

"Tell me all about them ; tell me all about everything," said Hope.

And with the sympathy and the self-forgetfulness which were natural to her, she asked question after question about

her old friends and associates. Even the farmers and their families, and the peasantry who worked for them—old Margot, who used to milk the cows in the lovely meadow just beyond the garden; and little Jeannot, who went on errands; and Jacques, who came every morning to draw water and cut wood for the household at Beaumanoir—were remembered, and it was only after some time that Mademoiselle Mallerie declared it to be her turn to make inquiries now concerning the many things of which she herself desired to hear.

“You must tell me of your own affairs,” she said, “and especially of Elsie. You are still like sisters, I know.”

“More than ever,” replied Hope; and I think I may tell you, dear Mademoiselle, since you are going away to-morrow, and it is so much nicer to tell pleasant news than to write them, that I believe—indeed, if all goes well I am sure—that Elsie and I will one day be real sisters.”

“My dear?” asked Mademoiselle. And then the truth flashed upon her, and she said, “Your brother Frank?”

“Yes,” said Hope; “he has been attached to her for a great many years now, almost, I believe, since he first saw her when he went to Ashford for his confirmation, though he never said anything about it until three years ago, just before he went to India, when he and Elsie were both with us for some time, and stood together as sponsors to our little Henry.”

“And are they engaged?” Mademoiselle Mallerie asked with interest.

“It can scarcely be called an engagement,” Hope replied; “if it had been, you would have been one of the very first to have been informed of it. Elsie was to remain perfectly free. Neither of them had any means then, and——”

Hope hesitated, for not even to Mademoiselle could she have alluded to the reasons that would have led Elsie

Gordon's parents only to give their consent to her marriage with Frank Savile, after a very long testing of the strength of his religious principles.

"He went away, however," she continued, "fully determined to marry Elsie, and I believe—indeed I am sure—that Elsie is truly attached to him."

"He will be a happy man," said Mademoiselle. "There are few girls like Elsie."

"And I really think Frank is worthy of her," said Hope; "we hear from all quarters how good and earnest he is, and as devoted to the cause of temperance as Elsie herself, and this has always been such a very strong bond of sympathy between them. He works as hard in the cause amongst his soldiers as Elsie does amongst her working men and boys."

"All my young people will be married soon," said Mademoiselle; "it is no wonder that I feel old."

Her words reminded Hope once more of Arthur's last injunction, which had indeed risen to her mind several times, though she had lacked courage to obey it.

Making an effort to do so now, she said, in rather an abrupt way, for it was still an almost impossible matter to Hope to manage anything by circumvention—

"I wanted to ask you—at least Arthur wanted to know—about Mr. Victor Raymond's marriage; *who* did he marry?"

"Her name was Fyffe—Helen Fyffe," said Mademoiselle, rather sadly Hope thought.

Hope trusted she would have added something more, but as she did not, she made a second bold effort and said,

"Yes; so we saw in the paper. Arthur read it out one day. We thought it must be he, for it was not likely that there could be two of his name living at Lyons. But you said he was engaged to a Miss Andrews."

This time there was no mistaking the sadness of Mademoiselle's face.

"It is a sad story, Hope," she said; "but I will tell it you if you wish——"

And, sympathetic as she was, and possessing as she did an instinctive shrinking from anything that might wear even the semblance of curiosity, Hope could not find it in her heart to answer anything else than, "I should like to hear it very much, if you do not mind telling me."

"His engagement to Miss Andrews was broken off, Hope."

"By him?" said Hope.

"No, by herself; but it was all his fault—entirely his fault. Those who loved him best—even his father, to whom it was a very great grief—felt that he only was to blame."

"He did not love her?" said Hope.

"I think he did, Hope; at least as much as he had left himself power to love any one. For he was, or perhaps I should say he *is*, so great a flirt that I believe he has frittered away in a hundred flirtations all the real feeling which, if it had been centred with faithful constancy on one object, might have made the happiness of his own life as well as of the lives of others. It was only when I came to know him better, Hope, that I discovered this. I had seen nothing of him until he came to Francheville that summer, the very summer you left, Hope; but I saw a good deal of him afterwards. And I was thankful, as were his father and my sister, when we heard of his engagement to Miss Andrews, the daughter of a clergyman at York, for we really believed that, once really attached, he would be constant to his attachment."

"You liked and admired her?" said Hope, listening so eagerly that her sympathy made it easy for Mademoiselle to talk freely.

"Very much. No one could help doing both. She spent several weeks at Mr. Raymond's that winter—a very

lovely girl, exceedingly fair, with that singular beauty of complexion which is so often an accompaniment of extreme delicacy."

"They were to have been married in the spring, you wrote," said Hope.

"Yes, but before then Victor went on a trip to Scotland; he was always going to Scotland and England on business connected with the firm, and there he met Miss Fyffe, a *very* pretty creature, Hope, unfortunately for herself."

"And he jilted Miss Andrews to marry her!" exclaimed Hope, her eyes bright with indignation, and the hot flush on her cheek vividly recalling the old Beaumanoir days to her friend's mind; "oh, Mademoiselle!"

Mademoiselle Mallerie smiled, sad as she had been looking.

"All the old eagerness is not gone, I see, Hope! No, not quite that; but he formed what he would have called one of his 'friendships.' He was a great admirer of English women; their refinement and cultivation suited his fastidious tastes. And this poor girl was very highly gifted. She sang and played most beautifully, and good music was a passion with Victor; and she was very intellectual, and had been very well educated. We never knew the exact circumstances of the great friendship that sprung up between them; no one ever does in such cases; but there was a correspondence and interchange of presents, and a good deal that was very wrong on his part."

"She did not know that he was engaged, of course?" said Hope.

And the intensity of her interest was so evident that Mademoiselle, never imagining that it had any more selfish source than the sympathy which had always been one of her strongest characteristics, was quite touched by it.

"I believe not, Hope; but that also we do not know

much about. Nor do we know how it all came first to poor Miss Andrews' knowledge. But it did, and she broke off her engagement."

"Of course," said Hope. "Poor girl!" she continued, speaking as though she had known her, and had seen her sorrow and her humiliation. "Did she love him very much, do you think, Mademoiselle? Was it a very great grief?"

"Such a great grief, Hope, that she never got over it. Not a year afterwards she died of consumption."

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" exclaimed Hope. She was actually crying now, which Mademoiselle scarcely wondered at. It was a very sad story, though she had not yet told all its sadness, nor did she herself know how much more sad it was than even she imagined.

"Yes," she continued, "she died, but not, as I say, till some time afterwards—not until after Victor had married Miss Fyffe. But we know that she was never well after her engagement was broken off, but faded away gradually.

"How could that other girl marry him!" exclaimed Hope.

And she was about to express her opinion on this subject yet more strongly, when Mademoiselle checked her.

"Stay, Hope," she said; "you had seen Victor's marriage in the newspaper, but evidently you did not see the announcement of his young wife's death. It took place within a month of poor Miss Andrews' death, not ten months after her marriage. We talk of the changes and chances of this world, but I often think, Hope, how much more strange they are than any one knows. People said it was a judgment. We cannot tell. If it were, I am afraid it had not very much effect upon Victor, for he seems to be but little changed, even though so much has happened which one would imagine *must* have changed him, did we not know, Hope, that nothing, *nothing* can really change any one except the

influence of God's Holy Spirit. We hear of him constantly at Lyons, where he still seems to have the same power of fascinating and being fascinated by the most perishing of charms.

"I think," she added, "that a passion for beauty, beauty in every form, has been the ruin of his character ; destroying his usefulness in the world, perverting the good gifts with which God has so richly endowed him, and marring the whole happiness of his own life and the lives of many others."

"And yet," said Hope, "beauty is a gift of God."

"No doubt it is, Hope," replied Mademoiselle, "and God who made so many beautiful things intended, we may be sure, that we should take delight in them, and be led by the beauty of His works to the love and worship of Him who made them. But this is a very different thing from making beauty the chief object of one's admiration and interest, without any reference even to the God who made it, or to its influence on our own souls and the souls of others. I am afraid this is what poor Victor has done all his life, and does now. He has no pleasure in anything that does not gratify his eye, and thus he lives a surface life, burning incense constantly to vanity. His has been the 'lust of the eyes,' and I have learned that this lust is quite as destructive to the mind and soul as any other.

"But I don't know why I have been telling you all this about poor Victor," she added, "except that your interest and sympathy have led me on to speak of him, as I have never before done to any one, not even to my sister."

But if Mademoiselle Mallerie did not know, we do, and so did Hope.

She could not have told anything to Mademoiselle of all that was passing in her own mind, although it gave her a painful feeling to hear so much and to tell so little, and also

to have the deep interest which her every word and look expressed attributed to sympathy only, when she herself knew that it had another and a deeper source.

But that evening she told everything to Arthur, all she had heard, all she had felt.

Not, however, until some hours after her return to the Priory House, for Dr. Andrewes was waiting to welcome her, and Mrs. Gordon, and the babies, and little Ashford, whom she found brimming over with happiness, and resolved to be himself the first to communicate to her the news of his having been admitted, though still so much under age, into the flourishing Band of Hope now established at Westbourne, in consideration of his adopted father, Mr. Ebenezer Brown, being its superintendent, and Mr. Arthur Gordon being its chief patron.

All these various individuals had to be attended to on Hope's return, and it was not until the babies had been in their beds for hours, and Dr. Andrewes and Mrs. Gordon had also retired, that Hope and Arthur sat down together, as they did on every evening of their happy lives, for that one hour's talk which was to them both the crowning delight of the day.

Then Hope told Arthur all Mademoiselle had told her, as well as all that she could not have told Mademoiselle, and when that telling was over she felt relieved of the burden that had lain upon her heart. Cheered and strengthened by that long talk, she felt far less tired than she had done when she had first returned from her day's trip, when just as they were leaving the drawing-room, Arthur exclaimed suddenly—

“By the way, Hope, I have quite forgotten to give you the letters that came for you. One is from Frank, too. I hope you'll forgive me in consideration of my having been good enough not to open it, and I hope, too, you will leave the reading of it till to-morrow. The other has the Francheville

postmark. I should have thought it was from Mademoiselle if she had not been in London."

"It's from Mrs. Raymond, no doubt ; they write exactly alike," said Hope, "we must open that at once as it probably contains an enclosure for Mademoiselle which must go by the first post. We will leave it on the hall table for Ben to see and take it the first thing in the morning."

And Hope came quietly back into the drawing-room to take the letters, which Arthur had returned to fetch from the chimney-piece, little imagining of the further conversation, and of the fresh excitement which would be involved in the opening of those letters, on which she so strongly insisted.

"It was such a curious chance," she said afterwards, "that one of them, at all events, should have arrived on the evening of that day ; when she had just heard for the first time of the death of Mary Andrews, and of Helen Fyffe."

Frank's letter was opened first, Hope pleading that "she did not feel the least tired, and after all it was only eleven o'clock, and they often sat up much later." An enclosure fell from it addressed to Mr. Gordon.

"For my father," said Arthur, as he took it up. "What can Frank be writing to my father about ?"

"I can tell you," exclaimed Hope. "Oh, Arthur, such good news ! Frank's regiment is ordered home in the spring. And he wants us to use our influence with your father to let him and Elsie be married immediately on his return. He says that the news of his orders home having reached him at the same time as the final settlements about aunt Lucilla's money, which will secure to him a nice little income, make it seem as though God were opening a way for the fulfilment of his hopes. He says that you are to plead for him with your father, and I am to plead for him with Elsie ; but *this* will not be necessary. Elsie will not say no."

"Nor will my father," said Arthur. "I feel quite sure Frank's high character is too well known now for him to desire any longer probation. He has waited all these long years, my father will not even wish him to wait any longer."

And they were still rejoicing together over the happy prospects in store for Frank and Elsie, when Hope broke the seal of the other letter, which also contained an enclosure, addressed, as she had imagined it would be, to Mademoiselle Mallerie.

But there was also a note for Hope herself, and as she read it, the expression of her face, which had been so full of joy that it had been a delight to Arthur to look upon it, changed so suddenly as quite to startle him.

He took the note from her hand.

It contained only a few lines from Mrs. Raymond, asking Hope, in case her sister should not be, as she imagined, at Westbourne, to forward the letter at once to her London address.

"We are anxious it should reach her before she leaves," she wrote, "for we do not wish her to have the shock of finding us in mourning on her return; and we have had a very sudden bereavement in our son Victor's death at Lyons. The news of his illness and death reached us by the same mail. It was an attack of violent fever. His father grieves sadly at no one having been with him, for he died quite alone, although surrounded by so-called friends. There is but little heart in what is called 'the world,' and not one of these was willing to incur the risk of catching the fever by ministering to him in his last hours. Of course the heaviest part of the whole sorrow will be to my sister, as it is to us, that we know nothing of what may have been his thoughts or feelings in those last solemn hours."

CHAPTER XLI.

"WHAT'S the matter with Hope?" said the doctor to Arthur next morning, as, breakfast over, she left the room followed by Mrs. Gordon, for that visit to the babies in the nursery, which was *almost* as great a delight to the grandmother's heart as the mother's. "Has that baby of hers been keeping her awake all night, or did you let her sit up too late? She looks perfectly worn out."

"She did sit up very late," replied Arthur. "Unfortunately, I forgot to give her the letters that came for her while she was away until just as she was going up to bed. One of them contained very good news, as she told you at breakfast. But the other brought the tidings of the death of an old friend. It was a great shock to her, especially coming as it did, after the fatigue of her journey, and her long day in London."

"What old friend? Not Mrs. Sullivan, surely?" exclaimed the doctor, who could think of no other whose death would be a shock to Hope, seeing that she had spent the day with Mademoiselle Mallerie yesterday.

"No," said Arthur; "it was a step-nephew of Mademoiselle's, a young Mr. Raymond, whom Hope knew very well in France, and met afterwards at Wallingford."

"Oh!" exclaimed the doctor; "an old love affair, was it? Something I know nothing about. Ah! I always knew there would be something amiss if that child went to France, and it has come out at last, has it! He was in love with

our Hope, was he? and pray was our little one in love with him?"

Arthur could not help smiling. He sat down again and told the dear old man, who was so completely the father to Hope that he had undertaken to be, just as much about Victor and his acquaintance with Hope, as he felt able to say, without either any reproach to him, or the slightest breach of confidence towards his wife.

"I see, I see," exclaimed the doctor, who *did* see with that characteristic quickness of perception which age had not deadened in the least. "The young fellow was taken with her beauty. He would have liked to carry on a flirtation with her just for the sake of her pretty face and her bewitching ways. Well, well; she was a fascinating little thing, to be sure, as no one knows better than I do, except yourself, Arthur. But it does not do to look only to beauty, does it?"

"No," said Arthur, "it does not."

"*You* certainly do not," replied the doctor, looking at Arthur with an expression of mingled amusement and affection. "I think I never saw any young fellow who cared so little for mere personal appearance. I don't believe it was even Hope's good looks that first won *your* heart."

"No," said Arthur again, "it was not."

"You speak pretty positively," said the doctor, with the corners of his mouth twisting themselves into the peculiar smile which always conveyed to Arthur's mind an idea of more real mirth than any other smile he had ever seen.

"Because I feel positive," replied Arthur, smiling too. "I don't mean to say that it was not Hope's sweet face that attracted me to her in the first instance." And his mind reverted to the story of the photograph, which was a favourite joke between him and Hope now. "But I can truly say that if I had found that the ——"

"The inner qualities of the heart," suggested the doctor, laughing.

"Very well, sir, that will do ; if, as you say, I had found that the inner qualities of the heart did not correspond with what I had imagined I had read of them in your little Hope's face and manner, well, I do *not* think she would have won my heart, for I had had a good deal of experience of life by that time, and I think I had already learned to appreciate beauty at its right value."

"Which, after all, is not such a very high one," said the doctor, more gravely. "It is a good gift, no doubt—all God's gifts are—but it is one that I believe is more perverted to false uses than any other, and moreover it is one to which the world attaches a very undue importance. I'm disposed to give it more weight myself than it at all deserves, I know, but I allow that it's a great mistake to do so, as Ben was saying only this morning."

"Ben?" said Arthur, who could scarcely imagine simple Ben entering into a disquisition on the value or worthlessness of personal attractiveness with Dr. Andrewes.

"Yes, Ben," replied the doctor. "We were discussing whether or not we should buy that pony I took such a fancy to. Ben suggests that we should ask the advice of some one who understands more about horses than any of us do. He is more knowing about them himself than either you or I, and he has got an idea that her good looks are the best part of her ; he held forth in the wisest way about it to me this morning."

" 'It wouldn't do, you know, sir,' he said, 'to go and buy her just for her beauty, and then to have her kicking over the traces the first time she got into a tantrum, or shying from one side of the road to the other, and perhaps pitching Margery and the little master and miss into the ditch, because she was such a fool as not to know a wheelbarrow

when she saw one. She's a rare pretty creature to look at, certainly, but good looks aren't everything ; we've got to remember that, you see, sir.'

"That was Ben's opinion about the pony, and it's my opinion it holds good with regard to many other things besides."

But at this moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the servant to say that the pony-carriage was ready, for which Arthur was waiting, it being his intention this morning to go his early rounds in it instead of on foot, as usual, and to take Hope with him, to see if the fresh morning air would not bring back some colour into the face which, as the doctor truly remarked, looked so unusually pale to-day.

Only one of the cream-coloured ponies was to be seen now in the little carriage, from which the pole had been removed and shafts put in its place.

"She likes it better like this," Arthur remarked to Ben, as he patted Fairy's pretty head, and despatched Ashford to fetch her a bit of bread whilst waiting for Hope.

"Yes, sir," said Ben, "she goes much better alone now that she has lost her old companion. She never will bear being in double harness with any one but Fancy."

"Well, then," said Arthur, "we won't try her again ; only we must never go more than two in the carriage and only for short distances. When you've decided on a new pony and bought it, I can always drive it, and we will keep Fairy for the sole use of the mistress and the children."

Of course Arthur told Hope every word that he had said to the doctor, and every word that the doctor had said to him, concluding with the question that the old man had asked, and the answer he had returned to it.

"I was right in saying so, was I not, Hope?"

It was a question that had been often asked before, for

Arthur was fond of hearing the playful, loving reply which it was pretty sure to bring.

But to-day Hope answered gravely.

"Yes, Arthur, quite, quite right. Poor Victor Raymond flattered my vanity, and gratified my tastes. He charmed and fascinated me. I admired him and was influenced by him. But I did not love him. Now that I know what love is," she added, raising her eyes to Arthur's with the expression of that true, deep love overflowing them in tender, thankful tears, "I see that I never *could* have truly loved him. For love is of God, and we can only truly love when we love in Him, from Whom our love comes, in Whom it exists, and to Whom it will return."

"So that it was left for me," said Arthur, with a tone of humility mingling with his tone of deep affection—"for me, who always feel as if I so little deserved such a gift, to be the first truly to win my dear wife's heart."

"Her whole heart, Arthur, as she feels it never could have been won by any one whom she did not deeply respect, and feel to be good and true—altogether true."

THE END.



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